

The Suffering Heracles:

An Analysis of Heracles as a Tragic Hero in *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles*

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Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of the portrayals of the Ancient Greek mythological hero Heracles in two fifth century BCE tragic plays: *The Trachiniae* by Sophocles, and the *Heracles* by Euripides. Based on existing research that was examined, this thesis echoes the claim made by several sources that there is a conceptual link between both these plays in terms of how they treat Heracles as a character on stage. Fundamentally, this claim is that these two plays portray Heracles as a suffering, tragic figure in a way that other theatre portrayals of him up until the fifth century BCE had failed to do in such a notable manner. This thesis links this claim with another point raised in modern scholarship: specifically, that Heracles' character and development as a mythical hero in the Ancient Greek world had given him a distinct position as a demi-god, and this in turn affected how he was approached as a character on stage. Heracles' potential as a suffering, tragic hero on stage was largely unacknowledged by Greek playwrights before and during the early fifth century BCE. The ultimate reason for this, as this thesis claims, is that Heracles' involvement in tragedy, unlike the other mythical heroes of Greece, would remain affected by his distinctive, complicated nature as a demi-god, until the time when *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* would be written. This thesis also demonstrates exactly why these two plays are so important for understanding the nuanced character of Heracles.

Where this thesis expands upon these existing theories is to organise them in a cohesive, systemic order, where the links between these claims, and also the links between Greek heroes, Greek tragedy and Heracles, are firmly established. This thesis first examines in brief the origin and nature of Ancient Greek heroes as a whole. This is done in Chapter 2, following the Introduction. At this stage, a link is already established between Greek heroes and the tragic element. Heracles is then described, and the ways in which he differs from other heroes is explored, with specific focus placed on his demi-god status as being a defining element of him. An overview of how Heracles was conceived and placed within Greek society up until the fifth century BCE is also undertaken at this point. Chapter 3 proceeds to examine the world of the tragic theatre, the essential elements of tragedy, and Heracles' place on stage up until the time of *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles*. Chapter 4 is an in-depth study of both of these plays, in order

to see what aspects of *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* develop the characterisation of Heracles, specifically as a tragic suffering hero.

Chapter 5 contains the conclusions reached by this thesis: that Heracles' complexity as a mythical figure owes a great deal to his conception as both man and god in different contexts for the Greeks, and that in this way; he remains one of the only true demi-gods of the Ancient Greek world. Furthermore, this thesis concludes that *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* are exceptional, not because they force tragedy upon Heracles without cause, but because they precisely explore this important element of his character, and rather than simplify the issue, they draw it out to its logical, tragic conclusion. And in return, we are able to gain a deeper appreciation for the figure of Heracles in this role, that of The Suffering Heracles.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The term “hero” is one that conjures up powerful connotations, for it is a concept that has been understood in one form or another by humans since the earliest periods of civilisation. But while nearly every culture that has ever existed provides us with examples of heroes and heroism, it is a fallacy to assume that the details and implications behind this term are consistent across cultures. On a surface level, a hero may seem to be the same from one distinct culture to another, but upon deeper investigation a culture’s conception of a hero can tell us as much about that culture specifically as any artwork or piece of literature would. As Kerenyi (1959: 2) succinctly puts it, “They [Greek heroes] were not always distinguished, not even, for instance, by heroism; that is why English ‘hero’ is not a satisfactory rendering of Greek *heros*, although it must be used for want of a better word.”¹

Within the context of the Ancient Greeks, which is the society that contributed the term “hero” to the English language, there was a nuanced and specific understanding of what constituted a hero and what could be called heroism. For the Ancient Greeks, the heroes had already come and gone, they had come before and done great deeds and they had all eventually died (with, perhaps, one notable exception). Heroes belonged to a Heroic Age, one which had taken place not that long before from a cosmological perspective, but which had undoubtedly already concluded (Pomeroy et al. 2012: 73). An example of this is one of the most important events in Greek heroic literature, the Trojan War. The most famous and enduring source for this was *The Iliad*, composed circa the eighth or ninth century BCE. The events of the Trojan War were at the time believed to have taken place around a period of time that modern dating systems would consider the twelfth or thirteenth centuries BCE.² What this shows is that this period, which would be mythicized to such an extent and which would involve the most famed heroes, existed far outside

¹ The use of the term “hero” in the discussion relating to its use in the Greek context is complicated because of the Western world’s fascination with Ancient Greek literature. This has often led to situations where Greek terms are adapted and ascribed Western, modern values, with their original meaning then forgotten. The tendency of Western mass-media to use Greek literature as source material also contributes to this; mass-media is made for a mass audience to understand, and will therefore not often challenge its audience with concepts outside of their immediate frame of reference.

² This dating for when the Greeks believed the Trojan War took place is drawn from chronologies and king’s lists written by various authors. As an indication for the range found, generally the earliest placement for the war is Douris’ date, which can be calibrated with the year 1334 BCE, while the latest was Ephorus’ date, which can similarly be calibrated with the year 1135 BCE (Pomeroy et al. 2012: 17).

the living memory of anyone, but still within a time-frame sufficiently recent so as to be retained within cultural memory, albeit in a mythicized form.

With the fact being that their mythicized heroes were no longer inhabiting the world at the same time as them, for the Ancient Greeks, other means would be devised in order for an ordinary person of the historical present to connect with this heroic, mythical past. One of the ways in which this was done, as Finkelberg (1995: 1-2) points out, was that what a living person could hope for would be to embody the characteristics of a specific hero and to be afforded the great honour of comparison with that hero. To be described as having an intellect similar to Odysseus, or the strength of arms comparable to Achilles, would have been an immense source of pride for great leaders and warriors. Complex genealogies were written or authenticated, enabling many members of the ruling groups in Greece to identify themselves as the descendants of famous heroes. Often, specific families would be linked directly with the gods by proxy, as many heroes had at least one divine parent. (Hack 1929: 59). For modern scholars, these acts contribute to the blurring of lines between the mythical age, the Heroic Age, and the historical human ages when it comes to study of the Ancient Greek world.

So, the heroes of the Greeks were chronologically distant from them. No ordinary person would ever have met one of the mythic heroes nor interacted with them. This gap of direct connection (part of the very social structure in which these heroes were conceived) probably also contributed to the awe and mystique they inspired amongst ordinary people.³ The primary subject matter of most Greek art and literature usually concerned the gods and heroes and the events in which they were involved. Galinsky (1972: 2) argues that the vast corpus of myths passed down into the modern age in the form of literature speaks of the constant fascination these figures provided for the Greek peoples throughout antiquity. Galinsky (1972: 3) goes on to argue that heroes were often strongly linked with the city-states and areas where they originated or where they eventually settled. Many cities even claimed to have been founded by heroes, adding to a cultural system embraced by many city-states where authority and cultural pride could be drawn from that link with a specific hero, much as they would be if a divine figure had had a hand in the formation of their city-state. As a result, while heroes were generally admired far and wide, it

³ “Hero worship,” even in a modern context, undoubtedly functions far more successfully if said hero remains untouchable and unknowable.

was hard for any to be definitively claimed as Pan-Hellenic for they were usually so strongly linked with a specific region. There is one notable exception to this however, and that is the figure of Heracles.

Heracles may very well be one of the most famous heroes of all time, even outside of his Greek context,⁴ but he was extremely popular in the Greek period itself too. A comparatively comprehensive array of literature featuring Heracles remains extant, and he is also depicted on hundreds of examples of artworks⁵ that remain to us today for study. Galinsky (1972: 2) argues that the characteristics, iconography and history of Heracles were for the most part well-defined and well-known, compared to the disunity expressed by sources in respect of other notable figures. In addition, Heracles had widespread appeal. Stafford (2013: 138-139) points out that Heracles was popular amongst nearly all the Greek peoples, as well as within the majority of social classes, as the wide range of events linked to him meant that diverse specific features could be either highlighted or downplayed so that the figure of Heracles would take on whatever primary aspect was required for a group.

Heracles was so successful as a heroic figure and so popular for so long that he is in many ways both an exemplary hero, a model against which other heroes were measured, and also exceptional, because of the personal heights and depths that no other hero reached. As Fuqua (1980: 8) says, Heracles “covered the entire range of heroic exploits” and “all the tensions that can be observed in the study of Greek heroes in general can be exemplified in the figure of Heracles....a ‘hero of heroes’.” Galinsky (1972: 40) suggests that Heracles engages in virtually every form of heroic act that was notable in Greek literature. Heracles is also notably distinct from other heroes in one other major way: as mentioned earlier, nearly all other heroes died, whereas Heracles ascended from his funeral pyre to Olympus as a new god, to live eternally. The fact that evidence suggests that this is a later addition to the myths surrounding him speaks volumes about the growth of Heracles’ popularity over time, as Silk (1985: 8) argues. This conception of Heracles as both god and man in the literature is immensely significant in understanding the nuances of his character and how it was viewed by the Greeks. Fuqua (1980: 9) quotes Fontenrose, who highlights this by saying that Heracles uniquely “occupies every point

⁴ Most immediately notable is the popularity Heracles gained in his Roman form of Hercules, after the ascendancy of Rome in the Mediterranean sphere.

⁵ As Luce (1924) and Cohen (1994) both indicate throughout their papers on this subject.

in the religio-mythical spectrum from mortal hero through demigod and chthonian deity to Olympic God.”

For the Greeks of certain cities from the fifth century BCE, when it came to featuring heroes in a public space, a place where the average person could be exposed to literature depicting beloved heroes, the primary option aside from informal folk-tale retellings was in the world of the theatre. A significant period in Greek theatre was that of fifth century BCE Athens, as the remaining extant plays available to us indicate that there was a comparably large output of plays written at this time and area. The most prominent genre during this time, and the most respected, was that of tragedy, and it is here that the heroes were employed in a more immediately-creative context. Authors such as Kerenyi (1959: 14), Finkelberg (1995: 2) and Cook (1999: 150) all make similar deductions, concluding that the myths of a hero will invariably carry tragedy within them as part of their nature and that Greek tragedy merely highlighted and emphasised these points. The “Tragic Hero” was one of the most common character types throughout all Greek theatre.

What is surprising however is that Heracles features in comparatively few surviving tragedies, a fact which seems in direct contradiction both to his overwhelming popularity and to the manner in which other heroes were used for this purpose. He is depicted in various less serious or less important roles, but it is in only two plays, written by two of the most prominent playwrights of fifth-century BCE Athens, that Heracles is portrayed as what is described by Silk (1985: 7) as “The Suffering Heracles.” These plays are firstly *The Trachiniae*, by Sophocles, written circa 430 BCE, and secondly the *Heracles*, written by Euripides circa 420 BCE. Both of these plays show Heracles as a suffering, tragic hero for (as far as recorded evidence shows) the first time in Greek theatre, as Silk (1985: 1) emphasises strongly. They provide a dynamic reinterpretation of Heracles’ personality, but one which is still consistent with the earlier literature surrounding Heracles. Papadimitriopolous (2008: 131) argues that while *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* are considered unusual when placed in comparison to the other works and the style of these playwrights, the unusual nature of these tragedies serves a narrative and thematic purpose in conveying a distinct portrayal of Heracles. As Davie (1996: vii-xi) describes, both these plays were subjected to intense scrutiny and criticism over the centuries following their creation, and

they remain extremely important for providing insights into Greek views on the concept of the Tragic Hero, the role of the theatre, and the nature of Heracles as a heroic figure.

It is these issues that this thesis will examine, discuss, and analyse in the sections to follow. *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* remain the most comprehensive sources from which to gain insight into the figure of Heracles, but for the questions this thesis will address, other information from a wider range of sources is examined. An effort is also made to scrutinise the two tragedies against the background of the wider context in which they were created. Chapter 2 is concerned with gaining an understanding of the Greek view of heroism and heroes, as a reference point from which to begin understanding the world Heracles inhabited. There is also a focus on understanding how Heracles fitted into this world of heroes, and how and why his popularity and image as an exemplary hero developed. This provides an essential framework within which the primary subjects of this thesis may be discussed. Chapter 3 consists of a concise discussion of relevant aspects of Greek theatre, its use of tragic heroes, and specifically Heracles as a character. Within this framework, chapter 4 studies first *The Trachiniae* and then the *Heracles* as individual plays in order to understand how they portray Heracles. Finally, chapter 5 combines the findings from the previous sections in order to draw meaningful conclusions, and hopefully answer the central questions posed in this thesis.

These questions are, firstly, why was Heracles' potential as a tragic hero on stage largely unacknowledged by Greek playwrights before and during the early fifth century BCE? Secondly, what aspects of *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* develop the characterisation of Heracles, specifically as a tragic suffering hero? Thirdly, what makes these two plays distinct and unusual in how they treat Heracles as a character? And finally, why are these plays so important for understanding the nuanced character of Heracles? At the conclusion of this thesis, the hope is not only to have a fuller understanding of Heracles' role in these two plays, but also to have a better conception of Heracles as a Greek hero, avoiding the pigeon-holing and reductionism that plague many of the depictions of this multidimensional figure.

Chapter Two: Heracles as a Greek Hero

2.1. Greek Heroism

The aim of chapter 2 is primarily to present an understanding in general terms of how the Greeks conceived and viewed their heroes, and how the concept of heroism itself was championed by them. This forms the background for an understanding of how Heracles himself was conceived within this world, and to what extent he was either similar to or distinct from other heroes. The aim is to gain some insight into how Heracles may have been viewed and understood by the public of Greece. This in turn forms the basis of an investigation into how Heracles was employed as a figure in tragic theatre. Progressing from the general to the specific, an overall understanding regarding the role and nature of Greek heroes will be discussed, becoming more specific as it is applied to Heracles. Section 2.1 will begin by providing a brief examination of heroism as conceived of in the Ancient Greek societies.

Ekroth (2006: 100) describes some of the difficulties when approaching the topic of Greek heroes as a collective, but concludes that what can be found to be comparative between them all is their “heterogeneity, both in relation to the nature of the heroes themselves and the appearance of their cult-places, and, to a lesser extent, their cult practices.” Even exploring the origin of the term “hero” itself provides some challenges. The English word “hero” is derived from the Greek ἥρως, or hērōs, with the Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon listing the word both in relation to the Heroic Age in which heroes were supposedly active in Ancient Greece, and also in regards to the figures themselves. The Lexicon emphasizes the point that this word was used for figures who were objects of worship, or to whom divine honours were paid (Online LSJ Greek-English Lexicon).

Some of the earliest evidence of heroic figures in Greek culture comes to us via two avenues: the first is the earliest extant Greek literature, such as the Homeric Epics of the eighth century BCE, and the second is the result of archaeological examinations of the remains of heroic sanctuaries. These sites existed in one form or another, with some regional differences, both across the

majority of mainland Greece and on some of the islands. (Antonaccio 1994: 395). It is possible at this early point that heroes might also have featured as imagery on artefacts such as pottery, but an in-depth analysis of all these materials is outside the scope of this thesis. In general, when heroic cult sanctuaries are discussed in this thesis, it will be assumed that all fixed structures and objects within them are part of the discussion. Hack (1929: 59) goes on to explain that it is very difficult to extract the order of development between literature and cult worship sites. It is not known to what extent Homer might have been aware of the development of heroic cult worship at the time of composition of his epics, and it is therefore also unknown for certain as to whether his works were reflective of any contemporary societal viewpoints regarding heroic cult worship. Seaford (1994) implies that he is unsure in what ways the Homeric epics may have been influenced by religious rituals of the age, but describes it as a distinct possibility. The full extent to which Homer was influenced by heroic cult worship is likely to remain unanswered, but Coldstream (1976: 8) argues that it is reasonable to assume that at the very least Homer's prominent use of the Trojan War and heroic figures in his epics indicates that some form of popular interest in heroes was present in society at the time. Ekroth (2006: 103) also argues that it is possible that the spread of the Homeric epics stimulated the identification of certain Mycenaean tombs with the heroes mentioned in the epics.

Both literary sources, such as the Homeric Epics, and material sources, such as objects and adornments at the heroic cult sites of the same period, demonstrate the strong conceptual links between early heroes, war and armed conflict. In the Homeric era the notable actions and qualities of heroes are depicted only concerning their specific involvement in the Trojan War and the period immediately after that. "Heroes" in the context of Homeric literature, were primarily the major named combatants of *The Iliad*, with *The Odyssey* going on to show some of those heroes in the aftermath of the Trojan War. Authors such as Cook (1999: 150) and Finkelberg (1995: 1) point out that in this context, a hero is someone who is a skilled warrior, someone who draws personal pride from strength at arms, and someone to whom nobility and proper bearing is important even if he does not always live up to that ambition. The heroes were often distinct from the other rank and file troops, serving as leaders in both a literal and emotional sense to that class of fighter. These heroes had various specific features highlighted according to significance, which will be discussed more deeply in section 2.2, but their martial skill and strength remain, as Cook (1999: 151) argues, of paramount importance.

While the historicity of the Trojan War is not the focus of this thesis, it is important to note that as far as can reasonably be determined the Greeks believed that the events of the War did take place. This can be evidenced partly by the fact that a common source seems to be present for literature created to describe the war, as literature spread over extremely wide areas addresses the same key points of the conflict. These key points, which cover the conceptions held by the Greeks of the eighth century BCE, are in short, as Hack (1929: 60) argues: in a somewhat distant era in the past, a group of city-states sharing some common cultural elements that link them to the later Greek world, with a civilisation that was supposedly far more advanced than that of the eighth century BCE Greeks, defeated an extremely powerful foreign nation in Asia Minor, demonstrating the superiority of their martial prowess. From this, later Greeks drew a sense of pride over the citizens of Asia Minor. Whether the warrior-heroes themselves were historical figures or not is not the ultimate point here; what is important, as Finkelberg (1995: 6) reminds us, is that this sentiment was so strong that the most notable named heroes of the conflict were placed in an interesting new position in the highly-hierarchical world of the Ancient Greeks. They became linked with the gods in a distinct way: many were said to be offspring of a deity and a mortal, which subsequently accorded them a distinct level of honour and respect, below the gods, but certainly above the average person. Ekroth (2006: 104) argues that it was also possible that mythical heroes could grow out of both an ordinary person having the events of their life become mythicized over long periods of time, or from a local, minor god becoming “demoted” to a hero, rather than remaining an independent divine figure. The belief⁶ the Greeks had in the exploits of the heroes is important to note: Greek culture, as demonstrated especially in the world of theatre, had a great sense of historicity, meaning that events in the past were often linked to subsequent events in the present, with myth and literature used as tools for this purpose. As J. Burckhardt, quoted by Kerenyi (1959: xix), puts it:

The entire civilization [of the Greeks], along with all the commissions and omissions, was still the old original one, except that it was gradually evolving....The whole Greek race considered itself to be heir and assign of the Age of the Heroes; retribution was still exacted for the wrongs suffered in primeval times. Herodotus begins his story of the great

⁶ It is also important to note that this did not only take the form of passive belief, but was actively engaged with through worship, primarily within the context of heroic cult worship sites.

battle between West and East with the abduction of Io, and the Persian War is a continuation of the Trojan.

As a result of the admiration for heroes and their deeds, heroes were eventually brought into the daily life and rituals of cult worship of many average Greeks. Household cult worship began within Greek families originally as a form of honouring past ancestors, in which performing rites and providing libations expressed respect, with the hope that the ancestors would be able to provide protection for their honourable family in the present (Fuqua 1980: 2). Over time, many families began to claim descent from the mythical heroes of the past, and began worshipping them in increasingly more specific, ritualised ways, using the same cult infrastructure as they had before used only for their own direct ancestors. As Guthrie, quoted by Fuqua (1980: 3) says, hero-worship was: "...the elevation of ancestors or other dead men to semi-divine status with all the apparatus of prayer and cults."

As heroes began to be increasingly popularised in society at the time, hero cults emerged in more areas, functioning in a manner reminiscent of the older, purely private shrines of each family, but now as cults belonging to a more public, general sphere of life for all Greek peoples (Hack 1929: 61). These cults were spread over the entirety of the Greek region, and while a few were most certainly used for political purposes or as a form of control (which will be discussed in section 2.4, specifically referencing the fifth century BCE Athenian context), what is clear is that the role held by heroes for the Greeks, as Stafford (2013: 138-139) claims, was being established formally at around this point (specifically, from the period concluding the Greek Dark Age and on, circa 750 BCE). Parker (2011: 123) specifically rejects the notion that the primary purpose of heroic cults as a whole was for political gain; rather emphasizing instead the importance of what heroes meant for the individual. Heroes were figures to adore, respect, and worship because, although they were detached and removed in nature, time and space from the day-to-day life of the average person, they were closer to humans and human concerns than the gods were. Ekroth (2006: 111) describes how many local communities drew pride from their links to supposed heroic burial sites, and how they would jealously guard these places in case of theft. The gods still received the ultimate level of respect, but heroes were greatly appreciated for their human qualities, human actions, and human desires, which were enhanced to a more impressive state by the interactions and blessings they received from the gods, who were oftentimes their parents as

well.⁷ As Kerenyi (1959: 14-16) points out with regard to any examination of heroes, extracting the mythical qualities from a hero and thereby forcing a hero into a purely historical mould, removes all the most significant characterising features, of which the link between the divine and human is especially important.

A larger proportion of extant Greek literature that survives from the eighth century BCE on shows a continued fascination with heroes and heroism. Heroes are prominent in epics, also in lyric poetry, and later, in the tragedies performed for the stage from the sixth and fifth centuries BCE onward; heroes and their deeds form an integral part of the subject matter in all the most prominent literary types. Kerenyi (1959: 14) argues that the tragedies were in essence a cultural evolution of the heroic cults which had been formed earlier and which continued even at that time. Kerenyi goes on in the same section to claim that the tragedies performed are “cult actions as narrative” (1959: 14), in which the acknowledgement, appreciation and enjoyment of heroic deeds remain the same, but are now placed within a more public sphere of life.

From the period of the eighth to the fifth century BCE, it is clear that for the Greeks of this era a great deal of cultural and public life was either directly related to or somehow involved the extremely popular mythical heroes. Whitely (1988: 181) goes so far as to claim that often the spread of a *polis* can be traced through heroic cult areas being first established on the periphery, followed by the *polis* expanding both physically and influentially to meet these sanctuaries.

There also seems to be clear evidence that heroes and heroism remained one of the most popular themes in any creative expression for the populace at the time (Pomeroy et al. 2012: 73). The heroes who had initially been depicted as primarily concerned with warfare and violent conflict now acquired additional features and qualities in the retelling of their myths through literature, although they also continued to be portrayed as strong and able fighters. Tyrrell and Brown (1991) describe how the *arête* standard originally functioned as the standard of mythmaking, in which it demanded excellence (normally in battle) from the heroes, but as a result would lead to situations where the heroes might very well destroy what they sought to protect. A hero in search

⁷ As an example and case study of this, Hooker’s (1988) paper examines cult worship areas of Achilles specifically, and investigates the rites and incantations and inscriptions used in various sites of this kind. From there Hooker explores the difficulty in extracting differences between inscriptions meant for heroes and inscriptions intended for the gods, and how they were linked at times and yet are also important to differentiate. Although his study is of sites dedicated to Achilles only, it remains relevant to all comparable heroes of this period of the Dark Age and on.

of glory in battle might very well abandon his home and leave it unprotected to seek such a fight out. The *arête* standard was limiting for a hero, and as such, the expanded array of qualities emerged, beyond only glorious fighting.

In conclusion, Ekroth (2006: 113) summarizes his description of the Greek hero cult as a whole through the following analysis: Ekroth argues that that Greek religion in the eighth century BCE can be imagined as the relationship between the gods, heroes and the dead. The gods are free and eternal in power; the dead are fixed and largely powerless. The heroes meanwhile were revered for their ability to seemingly move between the divine sphere of influence and the ordinary dead's sphere of influence. They seemed to transcend the limitations of both, and Ekroth (2006: 114) points out that even as cult-worship changed in structure and focus from the eighth century BCE on, the adoration of heroes survived, which was perhaps an indication of their lasting appeal. Sourvinou-Innwood (1995) in the largest chapter of her work describes in depth how the grave marker of the heroic sanctuary functioned as a *sema*, in which the marker was not only there to show what the individual had been in life, but to demonstrate what they had become and remained for people still living and for the community at large. When analysing how the Greek's viewed their heroes in light of these theories, it is not surprisingly at all that they attracted such lasting popularity.

The next section of this thesis is intended to provide a deeper understanding of some specific characteristics and features of heroes. Section 2.2 aims to discern between the aspects and personality types which were prized in heroes and those aspects that were potentially destructive or simply cause for concern.

2.2. Characteristics of the Typical Greek Hero

For the purposes of this thesis, it is necessary to gain an understanding of the qualities shared by Greek heroes, in order to form a conceptual image of a "typical hero." Of course, this relies on some level of generalisation that could be harmful if overemphasised, but at the same time it is reasonable to assume some characteristics shared by all heroes, or they would not have been grouped together under that same umbrella term. This section will begin the construction of a "typical hero" concept from the earliest point of recorded heroic-based literature, that of the Homeric era. Although the majority of this thesis as it progresses will be concerned with

Heracles in the fifth century BCE, the basic conceptions of heroes as codified by Homeric era literature remained the foundational characterisations from which nearly all later portrayals were developed or adapted. The Homeric era portrayals of heroes were influential for many centuries, and featured the earliest, most general idea of what being a hero meant in a Greek context. It is also in the Homeric era that heroes can most readily be compared to one another because of shared characteristics: later centuries would make heroes far more distinct, with their comparable aspects remaining primarily those conceived in the Homeric period. In the majority of cases, these Homeric era heroes were not radically altered over the centuries, and did not have their primary characteristics removed, but rather had additional features added onto them.⁸ The purpose of this section overall is that once an image of the “typical hero” is constructed, it forms the background to an examination of the ways in which Heracles differed from these established typical features and of the reasons for this.

The majority of this section and the next section, section 2.3, is based on the work presented in Cook (1999) and Finkelberg’s (1995) detailed papers on heroic qualities, but other authors’ theories are noted where relevant. Cook’s (1999) work is primarily focused on Odysseus, discussing him in relation to Greek heroism as a whole and comparing him in particular to the figure of Heracles. Cook (1999: 149) argues that the figure of Odysseus in *The Odyssey* is characterised in a manner which is unusual compared to many other Homeric-era heroes, but similar to the figure of Heracles. In this way, Cook argues, Odysseus serves as homage to Heracles. Although of course Odysseus is unrelated to the overall purpose of this thesis, Cook’s article is highly relevant since it contains firstly a comprehensive description of typical heroism, from which Odysseus differed, and secondly a description of how Heracles’ character was conceived in the Homeric era. The former point is of great use to this section, and the latter point is of major relevance in general throughout the thesis.

To examine heroic qualities is, in general terms as this thesis reasons, the act of examining the personality of individuals to see what links them. It is essentially a character sketch on a grand

⁸ It would then be at the pleasure of the author or playwright using the heroic figure to decide which characteristics accumulated in that figure should be emphasised or diminished in their specific work for their specific purposes. As shall be seen in Chapter 4, Sophocles and Euripides were masters of this tool in a theatrical context.

scale, in order to establish common trends.⁹ The figures examined in these cases do not exist in the same sense as real people, but they were still created by the collective work of many ordinary people, people who enjoyed the tales of heroes because they could relate or aspire to them. This means heroes will always be shaped in a similar form to real people, albeit sometimes on a grander scale. They may not often deal with the most mundane concerns of ordinary people, but they have human emotions and desires, and they have to cope with the hardships of the world as ordinary people do. This distinguishes them from the gods and other divinities in terms of character analysis. As Fuqua (1980: 79) points out, the core definition of heroes was not that their desires and actions were inconceivable to ordinary people, but rather that heroes were set apart by their extremity in a situation. Being a hero meant that every action was performed to its greatest possible extent, which had both positive and negative results. Ekroth (2006: 104) reminds us that some heroic sanctuaries seemed to have been erected to stop a hero acting against the local populace, as much as it was constructed to worship that figure as well.

As mentioned in section 2.1, and as Cook (1999: 150) emphasises, heroes were conceived initially as warriors, and remained on a characteristic level inextricably linked with warfare, with many of their shared heroic features reflecting this. The most immediately obvious of these is martial strength, which all heroes possessed in one way or another and which was usually highly praised. Based on Cook's (1999: 150) arguments, I extrapolate that to some extent this has permeated heroic myths as a whole, far beyond the Homeric era, because the majority of heroic endeavours involve, in their simplest form, the killing of something or someone. This could be a single named enemy, a group of unnamed enemies, or bestial monsters of varying shapes and sizes. In the case of an encounter with a single named enemy, this could either be portrayed as an honourable, yet perhaps tragic, test of might between two near-equal foes, such as the duel between Achilles and Hector, or it might show an especially villainous figure being dispatched for his misdeeds by the hero. When combating an entire group of enemies at once, the hero would slay them on the grounds of some injustice they had perpetrated, some crime they had committed against the hero, or simply because they had attacked the hero first. The reasons and

⁹ Any character sketch of a mythical Greek hero is aided by the fact that we have a corpus of extant literature from an extended period of centuries with which to construct a larger picture. However, these sketches are also hampered by the fact that readers of these texts now are so detached from the culture in which this corpus originated. The difficulties of interacting accurately with texts in this way are explored to a greater extent in chapter 3.1.

purposes might vary between myths, but the act of conflict resolution through violence has a firm place in heroic myths.

In addition to martial strength, martial skill was also appreciated, but there was a very fine line between what was considered low trickery and what was viewed as heroic cunning. Odysseus is a good example of this. As Cook (1999: 152) points out, he is a masterful tactician who often finds himself in situations that other heroes of his age such as Ajax and Achilles would have found impossibly demeaning, yet he still demonstrates the strength of character, inherent nobility and forceful personality characteristic of many heroes and his place amongst them is never questioned. The possible moral dilemma of cunning being necessary for success because strength alone was not sufficient was reconciled mostly by the context of the myth and was rationalised within that individual narrative. For instance, often a monster would be seemingly invincible, but would be defeated through the hero's realisation that something more than brute strength was needed, such as in the case of Heracles slaying the Lernaean Hydra or Bellorophon slaying the Chimera. This skill was especially appreciated when the solution to the conundrum was provided to the hero by the grace of a god (Cook 1999: 153).

A central characteristic of the typical hero concerns the issue of personal honour. As Cook (1999: 164) shows, heroes generally followed a strong code of honour, and when this is seemingly broken, their narratives often provide intrinsic reasons for why this is acceptable. For instance, a hero can break a code of social conduct when the person aggravating him has done so first, and by so doing has insulted the honour of the hero to a grievous extent. An example of this is Odysseus' slaying of the suitors and his disloyal servants upon his return home.

Another prominent feature of typical heroes is the idea of personal glory. This is again very much linked to the origin of heroes as warriors. The heroic concept of personal glory was strongest for the Iliadic heroes of course, but was on occasion used by ordinary humans in the real world as well (McDonald 2006: 84). The glory of heroes was one of the qualities most admired by ordinary people, especially soldiers. The form this glory took is summed up well in the twelfth book of *The Iliad*, lines 322 to 328, when Sarpedon addresses Glaucus:

Ah, friend, if once escaped from this battle we were for ever to be ageless and immortal, neither would I fight myself in the foremost ranks, nor would I send thee into the war that

giveth men renown, but now - for assuredly ten thousand fates of death do every way beset us, and these no mortal may escape nor avoid - now let us go forward, whether we shall give glory to other men, or others to us (quoted in Finkelberg 1995: 1).

Finkelberg uses this passage to emphasise the importance of this glory for the heroes of the Trojan War, and to argue that in many cases the pursuit of the “heroic death” was the defining feature of heroism as a whole. To deviate from this desire was to deviate from what it meant to be a hero. Finkelberg (1995: 1) and Cook (1999: 153) argue that this is what makes Odysseus more similar to Heracles than to other heroes: that glory for them was obtained in a manner other than the heroic death.¹⁰ Of course, this concept of the “heroic death” is linked to the idea of personal immortality, which could only be obtained through the fame and glory achieved by such a death.¹¹ As McDonald (2006: 84) says, this sentiment pervaded the real world as well, and soldiers were encouraged to emulate the heroes by dying properly and proudly, having done their duty. In such a way, the noble aspects of death through war could be emphasised. The potential political and militaristic benefits of such an attitude being instilled firmly into the rank-and-file soldiers (using heroes as a rallying point) are obvious.

Understanding these common links between heroes in terms of their characterisation helps not only to give clarity to what it meant to be a hero and to show what brought all heroes together under that one term, it also serves a purpose in enhancing the understanding we hope to gain about Heracles. Heracles was a hero, most certainly, but he was distinct from other heroes in many ways, distinct to a far greater extent than even Odysseus was. This thesis aims to explore how and why this was so for Heracles, before applying that to the arguments regarding *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles*. For that purpose, working from the general to the specific is the tool used not only in this section, but in chapter 2 as a whole, as mentioned earlier. This thesis has so far examined the development of heroes and the features and characteristics of heroes in general terms. The next section will examine the concept of the tragic hero, which is significant in this thesis as the concept has to be applied to Heracles at a later stage. In such a way, the

¹⁰ It is ironic then in some ways that Odysseus interacts with the shade of a dead Heracles during *The Odyssey*, but that conversation serves some purpose too in discussing heroic glory through death. The wider implications of Heracles featuring at that point are discussed in section 2.6.

¹¹ Of course, in the real world, heroes had already achieved personal immortality through their cult worship, but the issue of cult worship is not often brought up in individual instances of literature, presumably for thematic and narrative reasons.

general becomes the specific; in chapters 2.4 to 2.6, the figure of Heracles will be compared to the description of heroes as a whole, and the points raised about Heracles will be more relevant and impactful because of the general groundwork laid in these earlier sections.

2.3. The Tragic Hero

It is important to explore the concept of “the tragic hero” in general terms and to examine how it affected the development of a conception of all Greek heroes. The background information provided in this section will also validate in part the relevance of one of the central questions that this thesis aims to answer regarding Heracles. The tragic element was crucial to what constituted heroism. The constant presence of tragedy is also not simply an interpretation made in hindsight by a modern audience, but was recognised by the Greeks themselves as well, from the time of the Homeric epics and until the extensive portrayal of heroes as tragic figures within tragic theatre. Tsagalis (2004: 3) highlights that within *The Iliad*, the lamentation for the slain hero, or *gooi*, was a central and driving feature of the text. Similarly, Griffin (1976) focuses an entire paper on discussing the presence of *pathos* as a force in the Homeric hero’s depiction. In regards to tragedy, although not every tragedy featured a notable hero as its protagonist, a comparatively large proportion did, and the development of the genre of theatre may well be inextricably linked with the heroes who provided such a wealth of tragic subject matter for playwrights. The interaction between heroes and tragedy is explored in greater depth in section 3.1 and section 3.2, but the key points of this section are the fact that heroes did by definition contain a tragic element, and the specific manner in which this was conceived.

Several authors have explored the tragic element in heroes and the causes behind it, mostly in their character studies of various heroes which are then applied with evidence and examples to heroes as a group. The overall term used by Cook (1999: 149) for this kind of heroic figure is the “Man of Pain.” Similarly, Silk (1985: 2) uses the term, “Suffering Hero.” The meaning of both of these terms is the same. The central theory of these two scholars is that pain and suffering and tragedy are essential features of a hero’s life, and are part of what defines his identity. Cook (1999: 149-150) goes on to divide the actions of a hero into what he calls “Active and Passive Heroics.” In this definition, the “active heroics” are what the hero does to influence the world around him, by his own choice, and “passive heroics” are actions that are performed against him, often entirely independent of his choices. When Cook’s concept of heroic action is considered

alongside the concept of the suffering hero, it leads to the idea that heroes can both suffer from tragic events that affect them but are outside of their control, and can also be the cause of tragedy in the lives of others through their actions. This is said to occur if they are not careful in controlling their heroic might, with the implication that the hero is so powerful that his strength can easily break loose and inflict harm upon the average person in his immediate environment. The word in the original Greek for this kind of action is *ἀτάσθαλος*, transcribed as *atásthālos*, and usually defined as “reckless or presumptuous” (Cook 1999: 149). To illustrate what *atásthālos* implies in practice, Cook (1999: 149) gives the example of it being the kind of act a god could perform without fear of repercussions. Furthermore, if a human were to act in such a way, their lack of fear regarding the consequences of their actions would be seen as presumptuous at best and actively wicked at worst. Heracles himself, being someone who performed every typical heroic act, both good and bad, at least once during his lifetime, provides several examples of this “reckless or presumptuous” form of action, from his slaying of his family¹² to the killing of a guest at Tiryns (Cook 1999: 149).

Atásthālos as a term to describe a hero concerns the “active” definition of heroic actions, as Cook explains them, for it is a term related to something a hero does to another person. When it comes to the “passive heroics”, as Cook defines the concept, (when a hero is impacted by the actions of others), a separate term is more commonly used to describe such effects upon a hero. In the original Greek this word is *athlos*, which carries two basic meanings, one referring to athletic competition and the other describing a general “struggle” of some nature (Finkelberg 1995: 3). The reason the word *athlos* is specifically important for this thesis, putting aside possible synonyms in Ancient Greek, is that as Finkelberg (1995: 4) points out, in the majority of cases in literature, it was this specific word that was used to refer to the kinds of struggles carried out by Heracles. His famous Labours, Finkelberg (1995:4) claims, when discussed in the original Greek, are usually described by the word *athlos*. This level of struggle does not belong uniquely to Heracles: the difficulties experienced by Odysseus on his journey are often termed *athloi* as well, but Finkelberg (1995: 4) and Cook (1999: 149) as mentioned already, explore the theory

¹² Although the fault regarding the death of Heracles’ family is, however, far more nuanced in practice, depending on which account of the event is being read. In the *Heracles*, which will be examined in section 4.2 and which describes this event, it is far more arguable about who is actually at fault.

that Odysseus is being linked with Heracles in some ways and they theorise that the use of *athloi* is a continuation of this.

From examining their specific usages in these contexts, it can be seen that what great heroes experience is not a simple struggle, as the day-to-day problems of life may be for an ordinary person, but has the connotation of extreme suffering, anguish and tragedy. These trials and tragedies force the hero into a state of endurance, where he must wait an indefinite time for his difficulties to pass. There is a clear etymological link, as Finkelberg (1995: 3) points out, between *athlos* and *athlios*, the latter word meaning “wretched or miserable.” Despite the extreme nature of his suffering, the hero is rarely killed or permanently defeated by these experiences, as much for narrative purposes as any other so as to allow for a definite “end-point” for the hero beyond this particular myth. Typically, the hero eventually overcomes his suffering, and is acknowledged as all the greater for having done so, demonstrating his true heroic value through bearing his suffering in a noble manner. Having paid such a great cost, a hero often finds himself rewarded with peace and success when he returns home, or if he no longer has a home, he gains a new one.

Although, as mentioned above, a hero is rarely seen dying in a myth, a few heroic deaths are described. Notably, for this thesis, this occurs with the figure of Heracles, and is discussed in sections 2.6 and 4.2. Death seems to be a constant theme that follows heroes: often they are the bearers of it, inflicting it on others, but their own deaths or impending deaths or even memories of the deaths of their peers, present opportunities for deep personal reflection and philosophical musing. The death of Greek heroes is an essential theme of tragedy, especially tragedy as it was conceived in a theatre setting. Kerenyi (1959: 14) explores the topic of the heroic death, in the preamble to his study on heroic tragedy:

The glory of the divine rests upon the immovable in him [the hero], but is shadowed by his destiny. He carries out the tasks apportioned to him by fate by means of his immovable element, to which his cult still bears witness after his death. It is the rarest of exceptions (as in the case of Heracles) if he does not fall victim to death; he is always in contact with it, death belongs to his ‘shape,’ and the cult testifies to the last, destined turn of the hero-life, for it is, after all, a cult of the dead.

This quote summarises the qualities emphasised by Cook (1999), Finkelberg (1995) and also Kerenyi (1959). They all theorise that heroes have the essence of tragedy present within them: tragedy is inflicted on them by others, and in turn is inflicted by their actions on others. Tragedy is part of the hero, part of his cult and part of his worship. Tragedy is an inevitable part of a cult, because aside from any other appreciated aspect of a hero, all heroes (aside from Heracles) were already dead by the time their cults came into being. Their immortality derives from the worship they receive from those still living, which is the primary way in which people would have been able to interact with them. As Kerenyi (1959: 14) reasons, these cult adherents would most likely have understood the fact that tragedy was closely tied to the figures they were worshipping and honouring, but it did not diminish their adoration of their heroes, only added another crucial dimension. Sourvinou-Innwood (1995: 89) argues that one of the overriding attitudes present in Homeric-era poetry as a whole is that “everyone must die,” and that this is certainly true for the heroes as well.

Finkelberg (1995: 9) reasons that this strong focus on the struggles and challenges of life faced by heroes could reflect a perception held by many average Greeks: that for the most part, life was a series of difficulties. In the words of Theognis, lines 1013-1014, quoted by Finkelberg (1995: 9) “Blessed, fortunate, and blissful is he who goes down to the dark house of Hades without having experienced labours [*athloi*].” In *The Iliad* book 24, lines 525-526 Achilles says, “This is the lot the gods have spun for miserable men, that they should live in pain” (Finkelberg 1995: 9).

However, the difficulties and tragedies of life were not portrayed as a reason simply to give up. Finkelberg (1995: 10) focuses the attention of her reader on the fact that Heracles on two separate occasions in literature says on this topic:

For mortals it would be best not to be born nor to look at the light of the sun. But those who grieve about this cannot act, and some must talk about what can be done (extract from Bacchylides *Ep. 5.160-164*, quoted in Finkelberg 1995: 10).

To make of this suffering a glorious life. (extract from Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, line 1422, quoted in Finkelberg 1995: 10).

The section from the Bacchylides uses the lives of both Heracles and the hero Meleager to argue that no lives are free from challenges, not even those of the greatest heroes. The section from

Philoctetes contains Heracles, now a divine figure, explaining what the will of Zeus is for both Philoctetes specifically and for all listening in general. What these passages demonstrate is that, to move past the *athloi* of life as the heroes did, and pursue the right course of action regardless, is the very essence of heroism, and it is for this reason, Kerenyi (1959: 14) argues, that tragedy was at the heart of hero cult worship for the Greeks. Sourvinou-Innwood (1995: 300) claims that a move began in the fifth century BCE towards describing happier fates for the heroes, but that the older attitudes towards emphasizing tragedy for the heroes certainly remained for a long time, and this divide in attitude is reflected in *The Trachiniae* and *Heracles* of that period to some extent as well.

This section aimed to demonstrate that tragedy is an inherent element of heroes and an essential consideration in depicting them accurately. Therefore, this section also highlights one of the central questions of this thesis. If tragedy was so ingrained within a hero's character, and heroes were so often shown as "suffering heroes," why was Heracles largely excluded (outside of the *Odyssey*) from being portrayed in this way? Even within the *Odyssey* the tragedy that brought Heracles to this point is not discussed or elaborated upon, and does not feature as a focus of the narrative. This anomaly will be explored throughout the remainder of this thesis, as it forms one of the core questions of the entire study. Section 2.3 has aided in showing the necessity and significance of this question. Returning to the process of moving from the general to the specific that was described in section 2.2, the sections examining heroes in general terms have now concluded, and the remaining sections of chapter 2 will concentrate on Heracles specifically. The first of these, section 2.4, highlights the use of Heracles in the political sphere of daily life at various points.

2.4. Heracles Used for Political Purposes

Section 2.4 focuses on describing some of the ways in which Heracles was used politically in the Greek world, and concludes with a description of his political implications in Athens leading up to the fifth century BCE context. The purpose of this section is to gain some level of understanding of how *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* may have impacted the portrayal of Heracles in the fifth century BCE Athenian context. The greater aim of this thesis is to understand how the depictions of Heracles in *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* were unusual, and for this reason it is necessary to understand first the norm to which they are being compared.

This can be accomplished in two ways. One approach is an examination of Heracles' role in the theatre world, prior to these two plays. This is covered in chapter 3. The other way is taken in this section, which investigates how Heracles was embraced as a symbol within political structures, and how he was used as a symbolic figure for various purposes. Furthermore, both this chapter and section 2.5 will demonstrate the popularity Heracles had as a figure, and how he achieved this popularity. It is important for this thesis to expand on this point, in terms of the later study of *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles*.

In many ways, this section can be seen as an examination of how Heracles was approached by people in the "real world," where despite being a mythical figure he had an impact and influence on major political decision-makers and societies. Such an examination will show how the image of Heracles became integrated in the Greek civil context which used him in the ways mentioned above; this in turn increased his exposure outside of any specific piece of literature. Furthermore, this section will also show how being used as a figure in one specific context (the most relevant here being the fifth century BCE Athenian one) contributed to the way in which Heracles became more of a symbol than an individual, leading to the loss of some of the dynamic aspects of his personality. The way in which Heracles became more one-dimensional is a concept that will be very important when studying Heracles' portrayals in the texts of *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles*, and it is therefore useful to gain that information from this section.

Blanshard (2005: xvii) describes the political functionality of Heracles as follows:

There has been no end of candidates willing to cast themselves as the 'new Hercules'. Of course, such claims require a certain self-belief. However, this hasn't stopped many of history's greatest egotists...from attempting to claim his lion skin.

As the above indicates, many powerful people have understood the potential for political or propagandistic benefit in linking a famous and mighty figure to themselves, and Heracles seems almost tailor-made for such a purpose, having such a wide range of attributes that could be cherry-picked as needed. Stafford (2013: 118) expands upon this idea, suggesting that in Greek society a figure such as one of their heroes was perfect for this purpose. This was primarily because the heroes were already well-known amongst the Greek people (with the greatest heroes

being relevant in many varied Greek contexts), they were well-liked and admired, often linked with a citizen's patriotic identity (in the context of a city-state), and also had the capacity to be easily exploited as an image. This is something understood by politicians today too: a dead icon is easier to manage than a living one, and can support any message you choose to have them endorse. Anderson (1928: 8-9) understands the use of this political tool, and describes the ultimate purpose for it: the end goal is to increase the standing of the current leader or figure himself, not only through a link to a hero, but thereby also through a link to a god who is the ancestor of the hero in question. Alternatively, politicians might try to link the hero with social mores in which they personally believe and wish to encourage amongst the populace. In many ways, this is a continuation of the practice in literature that features myths linking the great heroes with divine ancestry, except that now the effect is brought into the real historically-recorded world.¹³ This creates an interesting dynamic between the shrouded world of myth and the more solid world of history.

The link between political figure and hero can occur in several ways, which will be discussed below. For this specific examination, the chosen hero is Heracles, as his use in society is central to this thesis; also, what applies to Heracles here can often be extended to other heroes in general. As mentioned, the simplest way of linking a political figure or a ruling house to a hero was through creating a lineage with the hero at its origin. The direct descendants of Heracles were known through myth and literature, and it was through these that many ruling families of diverse city-states claimed descent (Stafford 2013: 119). Cartledge (2002: 263) presents a theory on how such claims were made. The literature that described the myths concerning the children and grandchildren of Heracles (who were termed the Heracleidae¹⁴) existed in multiple forms,

¹³ Heroes had a connection to both the historical sphere and the mythical sphere, primarily for the Greeks themselves rather than for the modern reader. Heroes were largely mythically-constructed, but did not belong to the primordial past as the gods did: they were far more centred in real space and time, albeit still very much outside of living memory. This remains of course different from the factually-supported history from which the political leaders in this section originate. This concept for heroes, as well as the practice of raising heroes above ordinary humans, is discussed in section 2.1.

¹⁴ By the time authors such as Pindar and Euripides were writing in the fifth century BCE, these Heracleidae had become linked in legend with the event that modern scholarship terms the "Dorian invasion." The invasion was considered by some in antiquity, though radically disputed by others, to be the return of the Heracleidae to seek their rightful inheritances in the Peloponnese, after having been driven out some generations before (Stafford 2013: 121). This is an interesting concept in regards to this discussion, as it shows a direct way in which a historical invasion is linked with a mythical hero. However, there is much that we still do not know about the Dorian invasion: the historicity of the event and details involving it are often in question, and neither Homer nor Hesiod makes any mention of a link with Heracles at all, and Herodotus does so only in a small, limited sense. This

mostly describing the travels of certain specific descendants of Heracles. Within these myths, each member of the Heracleidae would be said to have settled in specific geographic regions at the end of their journeys. From that reference, a royal family currently occupying that region would draw a link between themselves and the ancient member of the Heracleidae, placing said member at the head of a genealogical king's list. This claim would then be enforced through the influence and strength of that kingdom, and would become sufficiently well-known as a claim to be reported by authors such as Diodoros and Herodotus in later centuries. Cartledge (2002: 264) supports this conclusion of his argument by saying that while claims of descent from notable mythical figures were extremely popular amongst all the royal houses of Greece, it is interesting that so many used the Heracleidae for this purpose. Stafford (2013: 120) argues that the importance of the Heracleidae increased in equal proportion to the growing popularity of Heracles as a heroic figure in the Greek world.

Also, the Greeks at a later stage linked the Dorian invasion with the myth of the Heracleidae, but the invasion itself remains hypothetical as an actual historical event, functioning mostly as an explanation of how and why the major Greek language groups of the Classical era came to replace those of the Mycenaean Period (Anderson 1928: 10). Nevertheless, major city-states such as Argos, Messenia, Corinth, and Sparta all drew their origins directly from the returning Heracleidae, with Sparta specifically eliciting a great sense of national pride from this founding myth (Cartledge 2002: 265). Stafford (2013: 120) quotes the seventh-century Spartan poet Tyrtaeus (fr. 2.12-15 W), who states of Sparta: "For Zeus himself, son of Kronos, husband of fair-crowned Hera, gave this city to the Herakleidai, with whom we left windy Erineos and came to the broad Peloponnese."

The way in which royal houses and notable persons linked their origins to Heracles continued even into the Hellenistic Period. This period is outside the main context for this thesis; however, it is interesting to note that Alexander's linking of himself to Heracles eventually expanded the image and concept of Heracles as a figure to many of the areas Alexander had conquered, where

would seem to indicate that to some extent this myth was expanded upon or developed over an extended period of time between various authors (Stafford 2013: 122).

Heracles was adapted into a local form or picked up local traits.¹⁵ It can be said, as Galinsky (1972: 103) does, that this was as much about Alexander as about Heracles: conquered areas wished to draw legitimacy from Alexander so they supported the concepts of heroes he brought with him. However, this does not fully explain the extended popularity Heracles enjoyed in these areas even after Alexander's influence had diminished. The ultimate effect was the creation of a link of inheritances from multiple kingdoms to Alexander, to Achilles, to Heracles, and ultimately to Zeus. Although it is not directly the focus of this thesis, it is interesting to note how Heracles' popularity seemed to spread even outside of the Greek context.

The extensive travels that are a trademark of Heracles' myths also make him extremely easy to invoke for another political function, one that was related to his own mythic actions: the founding of colonies. Stafford (2013: 131) claims that as many as 23 known cities were founded by Heracles or in his name, and many of them can be geographically placed, or at least have their general areas fixed within a region where they would likely have existed. In this way, these cities could claim to be perpetuating the spirit of Heracles and to be blessed by him, even if direct lineage could not be stated.¹⁶

Heroes could also be linked with socio-cultural events, such as festivals. Roselli (2011: 1-2) emphasises the point that festivals in the Greek world were most often performed in honour of the gods, such as the great theatre festivals of Athens which acclaimed Dionysus. In a similar manner, Heracles too was honoured to an extent with the festivals to which he is linked. Although the Olympic Games were nominally in honour of Zeus, there are many scholars such as Golden (1998: 12), Spivey (2004: 225) and Young (2004: 1) who argue in their studies of the ancient games that these were credited in antiquity as actually being invented and devised by Heracles, and served the purpose of carrying on his spirit of endeavour. Stafford (2013: 134) quotes Lysias, circa 400 BCE, who stated in his *Olympic Oration* that Heracles founded the contest "out of good will towards Greece" with the games serving to create "mutual friendships

¹⁵ Margalith (1987) explores the spread of Heracles to the Ancient Near East, and Hsing and Crowell (2011) discuss the expansion of Heracles as a figure in the East, showing the remarkable distance Heracles eventually covered as a mythical figure.

¹⁶ Many of these colonies were in Sicily or Italy, and as Stafford (2013: 132) points out, they could be and were used by later Roman authors to serve the purpose of incorporating Heracles into their culture even more completely. This occurred because Hercules, their adapted local form of Heracles, emerged and gained a huge amount of popularity, acquiring traits and an identity that made him a hugely-celebrated Roman hero, and to re-establish his link with these early colonies further cemented this connection.

amongst the Greeks”. Stafford (2013: 133-134) describes how Polybios (12.26), Pindar (*Olympian 10* ll.23-5, 43-9, 55-9) and Diodoros (4.13-14) also all contain accounts of how the Olympic Games were of Heracles’ making, and how they exemplified his heroic qualities. Furthermore, although the Olympic Games were the most famous, Heracles was linked with other similar events, such as the Nemean Games which were first held in 573 BCE (Stafford 2013: 138).

Because chapters 3 and 4 focus primarily on plays performed in fifth century BCE Athens, it is relevant to discuss the state of Heracles’ political significance around that time and how specifically he had been used in Athens up until that point. Heracles’ involvement in Athens can be divided into two main periods, both of which explore the possibilities Heracles presented as political tool through his popularity, albeit in different ways. The first is Late Archaic Athens in the sixth century BCE, under the rule of the tyrant Peisistratus. At this time, as was true later as well, Heracles was a popular figure for decoration, appearing often on ornate pottery for example. Shapiro (1989: 13) claims that images specifically of Heracles’ apotheosis seem to have held a great deal of importance at this time. Heracles was probably very universal as an image amongst the populace, as he also featured in many prominent pieces of architecture such as on the metopes of the Acropolis (Stafford 2013: 139). In a series of articles written between 1972 and 1989, Boardman (1972: 58; 1975: 1; 1989: 158) expands his theories that in general terms, while Peisistratus did not actively claim himself to be an incarnation or inheritor of Heracles’ attributes or qualities (which would be seen as impious at best), the depictions of Heracles that emerged during his rule nevertheless were used to reinforce the viewpoints Peisistratus supported. As a result, over time Heracles became increasingly linked with aristocratic values, which were those Peisistratus’ regime viewed as important for society and wished to emphasise. Boardman (1972: 60; 1975: 1; 1989: 158) further claims that specific scenes emerged more prominently in art in direct correlation with festivals or celebrations organised under Peisistratus’ rule, such as the proliferation of Cerberus scenes around the time the Lesser Mysteries were established in Athens. Although a direct relationship between specific events and Peisistratus’ rule remains arguable, there is some evidence to support the theory that Heracles was used as a general popular figure to emphasise and promote desired societal mores.

The second major period during which Heracles was used politically in Athens was the fifth century BCE, particularly after the reforms of Cleisthenes in 508 BCE. Heracles had typically always been embraced by the aristocracy in Athens, and was perceived to support their interests more than those of the lower classes. Considering the class divisions that naturally occur between an aristocratic minority and lower-class majority, it is somewhat predictable as Stafford (2013: 139) argues that the lower classes would begin to associate themselves with a different hero, a more local one.¹⁷ This was the reason for the emergence of Theseus, who would grow immensely in popularity in this era. Theseus was used in Athens in much the same way as Heracles was: as a champion of people, a slayer of monsters and a pursuer of justice (Stafford 2013: 140). Theseus' myths have a similar structure and level of grandeur to those of Heracles, and some authors, such as Steiner (2007: 221) believe that the "Saronic Deeds" of Theseus were expanded or developed to incorporate elements of Heracles. In art of the time, these two heroes were placed at different locations in the Athenian domain: for example, the Athenian Treasury at Delphi depicted Theseus and his deeds in a similar manner to the way in which the Temple of Hephaestus in the Athenian Agora portrayed the Labours of Heracles (Stafford 2013: 141). As authors such as Barringer (2008: 109) and Scott (2010: 77) theorise, in many ways these two areas represented multiple views of itself which Athens held and wished to project at the time. Firstly, the Pan-Hellenic treasury at Delphi showed the Athenian dominance and conquest of the Persians, along with a continued affirmation of its strength through its native hero Theseus. Secondly, the temple in the agora of Athens used Heracles as a symbol of Pan-Hellenic goodwill, with the tacit implication as Scott (2010: 77) argues that Athens was the centre of this Pan-Hellenic world. In this way it can be seen how, through skilful political usage, fifth century Athens could lay simultaneous claim to two of the most prominent heroes of the Greek world.

Stafford (2013: 142) argues the resilience of Heracles as a popular figure, pointing out that although his popularity did diminish slightly during the early stages of democratic rule in fifth century BCE Athens, he remained important, and was eventually embraced again and adjusted to suit the new political landscape. An Athenian dedication at Thebes in 404 BCE was set up in the sanctuary of Heracles; it depicted both Heracles and Athena and celebrated the overthrowing of

¹⁷ Class struggles were never so extreme at this time as to make it likely that Heracles would have become a hated figure; however, the natural gulf of understanding between two distinct classes could easily have meant that Heracles became somewhat less directly impactful and relevant as a figure for the lower classes.

the Thirty Tyrants. At the very least, Heracles was now conceptually linked with the idea of a democratic hero.

The above section shows the various ways in which Heracles could be used politically throughout the Greek world. This demonstrates that social elements such as literature featuring myth did not remain politically neutral, but was employed by a range of figures for various political purposes. It shows us that a hero served concurrently as both a cultural reference and a practical tool. It has also given us an insight into how Heracles became so interwoven with Greek society, particularly Athenian society, which will affect our study of his role in the world of theatre later in chapter 3. The next section is focused on showing how the renown and popularity of Heracles with the Greeks was fostered through his own internal nature and exploits.

2.5. Heracles as an All-Encompassing Hero and a Praiseworthy Ideal

Section 2.4 above shows how the character of Heracles was employed in various Greek civil contexts as a model to emulate. This chapter will now explore some of the specific reasons for why he could be seen as a desirable model of a hero or used as a teaching tool. The aim of this chapter, similar to some sections of section 2.4, is to establish the popularity and widespread appeal of Heracles as a fixed concept. This thesis makes the claim that the level of importance Heracles had in Greek society of fifth century Athens is hugely significant in studying *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles*. The Heracles character in both these plays responds in many ways to Heracles' position within the context of the society in which they were written, so it is vital to gain a better understanding of what exactly that position was. The forms of such responses within these plays are covered in chapter 4. Here it is argued that the prominence of Heracles was created and enhanced over many centuries through his growing popularity and general appeal. Therefore, this chapter will look at key points in literature to establish reasons for, and examples of, Heracles' eventual position as fixed point-of-reference for what a great hero should be by the time of fifth century BCE Athens.

Some issues should be kept in mind throughout this chapter.¹⁸ The majority of the information gathered here is obtained from literature, both because there is relatively plentiful literature

¹⁸ A more complete discussion of this issue regarding the reader's interactions with ancient works is covered in section 3.1.

available for this subject matter, and because formal analysis of material evidence falls outside the scope of this thesis. The problems associated with using these pieces of literature relate to the fact that they represent but a small percentage of the total works that would have existed, and we can make no comment on those lost works. Furthermore, it is difficult to state with any certainty why specific literary works were recorded to an extent which allows them to remain available to us, and why others were not. A theory could be suggested that they were sufficiently re-written and translated to reach the modern era because they were considered so important and relevant, but that theory does not take into account the objectives of those who recorded and translated them while choosing to discard others for that purpose. It also as a theory does not account for the role of blind luck in determining what pieces reached us in the modern era. There are potentially too many variables to make this a cohesive argument. However, I wish to suggest that what can be seen more clearly is the impact of an earlier piece of literature on a later one. It is therefore relevant to examine how Heracles was perceived in eighth century BCE literature, because some of those works perceptibly affected fifth century BCE works including the two plays studied in this thesis. This will be shown extensively in chapter 4. Therefore, when this section wishes to demonstrate Heracles' growing popularity throughout the eighth to fifth century BCE, literature is considered a valid source when it can be seen to persist as a reference point throughout that period.

Also important to consider, is the fact that it is impossible to show with utmost certainty how an individual piece of literature could indicate the views of the average person regarding Heracles. However, the literature under discussion in this section was all to varying degrees part of the public sphere of life. Epics, lyric poetry and plays were all performance-based to some extent, and required a public audience. And because Heracles became a character and theme in so many of these, this thesis argues that it is logical to suppose that it is extremely unlikely that each and every one of these authors would have chosen to portray characters and subject matter that their audience would not enjoy. Rather, it would show that these pieces are a reflection of what an audience at the time might have appreciated. Indeed, this still does not give us any verifiable

insight into the mind of an average citizen, but it gives us a useful tool in the form of a general trend that can be observed.¹⁹

In many ways, to examine the process through which Heracles' popularity grew as a hero is to see him change in character, as his popularity in turn affected how he was typically characterised. The process usually involved a simplification of his nature, although major features were rarely lost, but rather just diminished. An illustration of this is the stereotype-image of Heracles: the most common perception of Heracles is that of an archetypical "strong-man." Pike (1980: 37) argues for this point, referencing the propensity for the emergence of extremely popular "strong-man" figures in most cultures, with Heracles retaining that position even in the modern western world. While this is certainly one aspect of his character, as a viewpoint it tends to impose limitations by removing many of the subtle nuances behind Heracles' character and turning him into a one-dimensional figure. This issue has plagued efforts to characterise Heracles authentically for many centuries, although the reasons behind the simplification have varied over time, as shall be seen later. As Pike (1980: 37) says, although Heracles' strength was indeed regarded as mighty, even by other heroes and his contemporaries, that in and of itself was not what made Heracles notable. Rather it was the efforts, both good and bad, at which Heracles' strength was directed that made him so remarkable, as he did both amazing things and terrible things on a scale not before seen in other heroes. So despite these stereotypical views, Heracles was always far more nuanced, as can be seen in the earliest literature featuring him.

Within the Archaic Period of the eight and seventh centuries BCE, when some of the earliest known Greek literature was being recorded, Heracles is characterised by two major authors, Homer and Hesiod, who each highlight different aspects of Heracles' nature in their works that concern him. As mentioned to some extent in the introduction to this chapter, it is necessary to begin a study of Heracles with Archaic Period literature, as much of his later characterisation used earlier works as a basis to which they added new elements. These earlier works are a valuable resource for study in that they were popular and relevant and therefore influential for many centuries after they were written. As will be seen, many of the sources in this section are drawn from the work of Galinsky (1972), who, despite having a different purpose for his

¹⁹ This is the same logic that is employed both by this thesis and by authors such as Fuqua (1980: 1) and Silk (1985: 1) when it comes to studying why *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* are so unusual amongst plays regarding Heracles.

arguments than this thesis does, nevertheless extensively discusses Heracles' role as a hero in Archaic Period literature. This is useful for the arguments put forward in this section.

In both of Homer's most famous works, one of the central protagonists is linked with Heracles. In *The Iliad*, the Homeric hero is of course, in the words of Galinsky (1972: 10), part of a "heroic aristocracy," a class-based distinction explored to some extent in section 2.1. These heroes were for the most part noble, glorious, honourable, and respectful of the order of the universe. (Galinsky 1972: 11). As Galinsky (1972: 12) puts it, against such an ideal for heroism, on a surface-level viewing the wild, war-like, passionate and hot-tempered Heracles can seem like a clumsy addition from an earlier age. However, as Galinsky (1972: 12) goes on to argue, Homer moves past the references to Heracles' earlier graceless actions, and later in the epic Achilles invokes imagery regarding Heracles that generates sympathy in the reader for Achilles himself. In the events following the death of Patroclus, in Book 18, lines 115-121 of *The Iliad*, as Galinsky (1972: 14) points out, Achilles makes mention of the inevitability of death. Achilles refers to the death of Heracles in order to point out that death could reach even Heracles,²⁰ and by extension therefore could reach himself. Implied here is the huge esteem in which Achilles holds Heracles as a fellow hero.

There are further parallels between Achilles and Heracles. Both are likely at any point to break the code of noble behaviour that is established in their narratives, and both have what Galinsky (1972: 14) calls a "lonely grandeur." As characters, both are ultimately more sympathetic as a result of this fallibility, and the fact that Achilles specifically praises Heracles during his contemplations indicates Achilles' high opinion of Heracles. As is known even in the modern world, Achilles himself was considered one of the finest heroes of all Greece.

Galinsky (1972: 13) argues that in *The Odyssey* lines 601-626, Heracles is linked with Odysseus too. It should be noted that the shade of Heracles seems to recognise Odysseus without any kind of identification or introduction. Galinsky is not alone in this theory; as pointed out in section 2.2, Finkelberg (1995: 1) and Cook (1999: 153) also reached similar conclusions. Galinsky's (1972: 13) specific argument is that *The Odyssey* in many ways represents a stage of civilisation beyond that of *The Iliad*: the intellectualism and refinement of the hero are praised above his

²⁰ The contradictory issue of Achilles mentioning the death of Heracles, when he was known to achieve apotheosis, will be addressed more thoroughly in section 2.5 as well as later in this thesis.

qualities in warfare, even though he was most certainly capable in that area as well. In this sense, Heracles seems even more out of place, but in one particular section (Book 11, lines 601; 605-608) Odysseus travels to the underworld and meets the deceased shade of Heracles, who seems sympathetic and encouraging to Odysseus (Galinsky 1972: 12). He commiserates with Odysseus over the troubles they have both experienced in life, and urges him to stay hopeful and to believe in the assistance of the gods. Odysseus says very little in this scene; as Galinsky (1972: 12) points out, it is Heracles who purposefully draws him close and provides comfort and advice, establishing a common bond with him. It is Heracles who chooses to meet with Odysseus alone, one-on-one. This scene also establishes the fierce loneliness of Heracles, which forms part of his bond with Odysseus at this time.

The description of what Heracles is wearing is interesting too, and adds to his characterisation without having any words be spoken. His baldric has its imagery listed in detail in Book 11, lines 611-612 of *The Odyssey*, with the implication, as Galinsky (1972: 13) theorises, that the imagery is transferable to Heracles himself. Galinsky (1972: 13) describes the baldric as primeval; the lines speak of it being covered with “bears and wild boars, and lions with flashing eyes, and conflicts and battles, and murders and slayings of men.” Heracles also does not appear with his traditional lion skin and club²¹; rather, he appears as a fierce Bowman, described in similar terms to the appearance of Odysseus at the climax of the epic in Book 22 (Galinsky 1972: 14).

The above sections show that Homer portrays multiple views of Heracles within *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. The important points this thesis wishes to argue based on the observation of how Homer portrays Heracles are as follows: Heracles is part of the same brotherhood of heroes as Achilles and Odysseus, and they can relate to him as both a warrior and a hero. However, Heracles is still regarded with something approaching awe by both of them. This is especially important when noting how much the eighth to fifth century BCE Greeks revered Achilles and Odysseus, as authors such as Hack (1929: 57), Finkelberg (1995: 1) and Cook (1999: 153) point out. The implication is that Heracles has seniority in some ways above even these notable figures. These points would seem to indicate the importance of Heracles as a hero at this early stage, which cannot be ascribed to Homer’s authorial perspective alone. Scholars such as Hack

²¹ The club and lion skin of Heracles may not even have been part of his traditional paraphernalia at this point. Cohen (1994) has written an extensive and well-researched paper describing the evolution in Heracles’ physical depiction, including his paraphernalia, and her reasoning supports this theory here.

(1929: 57) and Coldstream (1976: 5) argue that the content of Homer's epics was as much the result of accumulated folk-tales and cult-worship as it was of his own creativity. This confirms the likelihood that Heracles' position within the Homeric epics is reflective of how he was considered in general, rather than being a literary invention. Worth considering as well is Grethlein's (2012: 14) concept of the "epic puplast." This concept describes how authors of a literary work respond to elements of the past within their work, and can also be used to describe how characters within a literary piece respond to the influence of the past upon them. In this situation, it is quite clear to see how the epic puplast has affected the portrayal of Heracles in the Homeric epics in how it has already afforded him a grand stature in comparison to his comrades.

The second major author from the Archaic Age who contributes to our understanding of Heracles' heroic status is Hesiod. In his *Theogony*, he portrays Heracles with a very different emphasis from that of Homer, but with aspects that Galinsky (1972: 16) argues would become in later works of subsequent centuries very typical of Heracles. Heracles is mentioned in the text through digressions, which, as Galinsky (1972: 16) points out, is in and of itself demonstrative of the interest in Heracles and of his importance: Hesiod is willing to drift from the central narrative dealing with the formation of the gods in order to discuss Heracles alone. In Hesiod's work, Heracles is shown predominantly as a moral figure, someone who is able to assume the more noble qualities of Homer's heroes but who otherwise acts as a saviour to the ordinary people and those less powerful (Galinsky 1972: 16). Heracles is described as slaying monsters and bandits and upholding the values of justice and order against the abnormal and disharmonious forces in the world. Galinsky (1972: 16) argues that Heracles' role in this sense is to serve as essentially an avatar for Zeus, portraying the positive attributes embodied by the king of the gods through being his favoured mortal son. However, Heracles remains very much his own man. He acts supposedly against his father's wishes in freeing Prometheus from his eternal torment, for which Zeus pardons him because of his wish that his son's glory be even greater over all of Greece, and that his honour should multiply. This, by extension, would increase the glory and praise for Zeus himself. In these contexts within the *Theogony*, Heracles is portrayed for the first recorded time, as Galinsky (1972: 17) notes, as a champion of ethical values.

In another earlier work, *The Shield of Heracles*, which was typically attributed to Hesiod, the emphasis placed on Heracles as a moral warrior is even more pronounced. The major events of

the account are described in brief by Janko (1986: 40). In the narrative, Apollo seeks Heracles to defeat the highwayman Cynus who is engaged in the extremely impious action of attacking pilgrims on their way to Delphi. Heracles does so in a noble, Homeric fashion, but a further problem is raised when Ares, as the father of Cynus, seeks retribution. Janko (1986: 41) points out that rather surprisingly it is Ares who is criticised for transgressing the bounds of civil behaviour, and Heracles is assisted against him by Athena. Finally, Heracles is portrayed as seemingly nobler than even the gods, for he gives Cynus a noble burial which is then washed away by Apollo, perhaps out of mere pettiness.

What *The Shield of Heracles* ultimately does, as Galinsky (1972: 18) argues, is make Heracles not simply the conqueror of multiple enemies, but a noble warrior who fights against sacrilege and impiety. In the text, lines 28-29, it is stated of Zeus regarding Heracles that: “he fathered him to be a defender against destruction for gods and bread-eating men.” Galinsky’s (1972: 18) interpretation is that in this way, the affair between Zeus and Alcmene which spawned Heracles is accorded a noble, prophetic purpose. The titular shield within the play is given an extensive description, recorded by Galinsky (1972: 18), which, in a similar manner to the baldric in *The Iliad*, seems to tell us more about Heracles himself. The shield is ringed with depictions of monsters and demons, and shows Heracles slaying them. In the centre is Heracles duelling with Phobos, the personification of fear itself. In the later narrative, it is Phobos who saves Ares and removes him from the situation. The purpose of Heracles is therefore extolled through the shield itself: he is a force that fights against the primordial fears and evils of the world. The *Shield* ultimately accords far more praise to Heracles than Homer’s works do, glossing over his more disreputable actions while emphasising the acclamation of the others. Galinsky (1972: 19) describes how Heracles is honoured with the terms *kallinikos*, the resplendent victor, and *alexikakos*, the saviour figure of high morality. These terms are especially prominent in cult worship of Heracles, so it is important to note that they appear within literature too at this stage.

Galinsky (1972: 16) argues however that the defining features of Heracles are not always of a serious tone and grand scale. In fact, a significant proportion of literature featuring Heracles depicts his humorous aspects. In one of Hesiod’s other works, the *Wedding of Ceyx*, he portrays Heracles in a humorous and jovial setting. The entire story is quite comical, with Heracles crashing a party, justifying his actions with good humour, and making the famous quip: “Of their

own accord good men betake themselves to good men's feasts (Hesiod fr. 264, Merkelbach and West).” In this context, Galinsky (1972: 16) argues that the quality of Heracles that was very important in many folktales and later Satyr plays comes to the fore here: he often takes himself lightly, making him a figure who never becomes too lofty and grand to be out of reach for the average person. The poet Stesichorus emphasised similar characteristics within his works, describing a humorous drinking bout with the centaur Pholus and a brawl that broke out afterwards between Heracles and the other centaurs. These themes, of the drinking, gluttonous, folksy Heracles, Galinsky (1972: 21) reminds us, would be repeated in the Satyr plays of the fifth century BCE theatre world.

Hesiod's works featuring Heracles are of extreme importance for his later characterisation. As mentioned, Hesiod was the first author to depict Heracles in an explicitly positive manner. Many of the values ascribed to Heracles that became highlights of his character first emerge here. These include his loyalty and willing service to the gods, his role as a saviour for the common man, his constant battles against evil forces, and his bawdy, playful personality traits. The majority of literature or material evidence featuring Heracles from the eighth century BCE on would show him with one of these personality traits as the primary focus. For this reason, Galinsky (1972: 10) begins his examination of Heracles with an in-depth study of these authors' works. While it is likely that Hesiod, like Homer, did not invent these features wholesale, he remains the first extant author to portray them in such a developed form. In many ways, as chapter 4 will show to a greater extent, much of the difficulty experienced by later authors in trying to characterise Heracles concerned their attempts to reconcile the Heracles that Homer shows, with the Heracles that Hesiod portrays. The significance of both being valid depictions of the same person only becomes an issue by the time of *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles*.

As a testament to Heracles' ever-growing popularity, even works in which he played only a minor role found ways in which to continue praising him. As Galinsky (1972: 19) describes, Archilochus, who was the winner of a hymn-writing contest held in honour of Demeter at Paros in the seventh century BCE, celebrated his victory by reciting a short hymn to Heracles, honouring him again as the *kallinikos*. The first words from this hymn, fr. 324, which pronounced “hail to the victor” in regards to Heracles, were adopted and widely used to praise Heracles at other competitions in his honour (Galinsky 1972: 19). In a similar sense, another

poet, Echembrotus, set up a tripod at Delphi in honour of Heracles in order to celebrate his victory at the song contest there (Galinsky 1972: 20). These examples show the wide range of areas in which Heracles received praise. It might seem unusual that Heracles the warrior was linked with music and song, but it says much for his popularity as a model hero that he was drawn into such diverse creative fields amongst the populace.

Most of the ancient literary sources discussed above come from between the eighth and the sixth centuries BCE, and it is within this period that the features which became the dominant characteristics of Heracles, as well as the range of secondary features, emerge. As chapters 2.4 and 2.5 have already begun to show, Heracles represents many seemingly-contradictory things at the same time. He is warlike and destructive, but also protective of man and of civilised culture. He is brooding and lonesome, but also bawdy and festive. He serves the gods, but also addresses the concerns of the average person. His tools are the club and bow, and yet he is invoked by poets and artists. Heracles' journey as a figure from folk hero shrouded in the distant past to divine hero of myth and legend is therefore visible within these separate accounts from the Archaic Age in Greece. It is at this point that the view of Heracles as a mere strong-man as mentioned earlier becomes clearly inadequate to address the deeper nuances present within this figure. What is important to remember is that even within the adulatory depictions such as the ones written by Hesiod, Heracles never lost his human qualities. He remained subject to the same concerns, emotions and fears as other humans, and he grappled with those issues in the same way as humans did on a daily basis. This fact, this thesis argues, is at the core of his popularity: that he would face the same difficulties as ordinary people but would rise above them. This relatable quality is what makes him so adored by the public and deemed worthy of emulation.

In much of the later literature that features him, and within the works of philosophers such as the Stoics and Cynics, Heracles becomes, in the words of Galinsky (1972: 296) "an exemplar, rather than a *persona*." He is a figure from which moral teachings are drawn in parables, a lesson to be taught, rather than a person in and of himself. In many ways, this limited the emotional depths Heracles was assumed to possess as a person, but it is demonstrative of a certain common thought process behind the perception of Heracles: he could be used instructively in parables simply because he was that famous and revered in both personality and deed. Galinsky (1972: 296) believes that the practice of using Heracles in a moralising way, of using Heracles as a

figure for teaching purposes, intensified as Heracles was increasingly worshipped as a god rather than admired as a hero, and that furthermore, a level of white-washing occurred, as certain aspects acceptable in discussion of a man become impious when applied to a god.

This section has shown us the ways in which Heracles was remarkable as a hero, emphasising how even his fellow heroes saw him as exceptional and notable. Furthermore, this section elucidates the many different qualities combined in depictions of Heracles that increased the range of persons with whom he would be popular and the ways in which he would be worshipped. This increasing popularity would come to impact on how and why tragic portrayals of Heracles were so scarce, as shall be seen later.

An examination of literature between the eighth and fifth century BCE cannot unambiguously reveal how the people of those centuries considered Heracles. However, understanding the trends of characterisation that began with Homer and Hesiod, and which would impact works about Heracles even three centuries later, can indicate the likelihood of several things. Firstly, these character traits of Heracles that persisted represented the most common ways of describing or approaching his personality. Secondly, the consistent growth of literature featuring Heracles, and the development of Heracles as a personality within those works over this time, indicate the ever-growing popularity of Heracles as a hero. And finally, even within this period alone, it is possible to see how popularity can become linked with caricature, and that an increase in popularity can result in a diminishing of complexity in a figure. All these points are significant when the time comes to approach Heracles in *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles*, because it is the playwrights' understanding of this development and their responses to it that go some way to explaining why the plays are so unusual, notable and valuable for study.

The final section of chapter 2 below will concern an important aspect of Heracles raised earlier in this chapter: the division between Heracles' treatment as a man on the one hand and as a god on the other. This is pivotal to Heracles' character, and requires its own section because it explains the unique nature of Heracles. Popularity alone cannot account for why Heracles was treated in the unusual manner in which he was in the world of tragic theatre. The remainder of the reasons for this lie in the singular aspects of the Greeks' conception of Heracles as a demi-god.

2.6. Heracles as Demi-God

The final section in chapter 2 explores one specific facet of Heracles' personality, one which is relevant to his depiction in multiple pieces of literature. This element is Heracles' nature as a demi-god; a person who was partially divine and partially mortal throughout his existence. *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* invoke this concept to a great extent, meaning that it is extremely important for this thesis to understand it before analysing those plays. It is also helpful to understand that this crucial division within Heracles creates a potential source of conflict between his two sides. The analyses of the tragic plays to be examined later depend heavily on keeping this understanding in our minds at all times, and it is one of the most vital tools in comprehending the many nuances of Heracles himself. This section will explore in brief what divinity as a concept meant to eighth to fifth century BCE Greeks. It will also show how the gods were perceived and how Heracles was affected by being so directly linked to them. Finally, this section will explore perceptions of Heracles at the time *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* were written, and will examine the extent to which divine elements dominated his portrayals.

The majority of this section is based on the work of Stafford (2013). Her work provides excellent background information obtained from various sources regarding Heracles' demi-god status. For the Greeks of the fifth century BCE, the original point of conception for their gods had happened so far in the unknown past that it would be difficult for any of them accurately to explain how any specific deity had been conceived or developed. Ancient writers such as Herodotus (2.53.1) specifically mention the problem created by this gap of knowledge:

As to the question of where each of the gods came from, whether they were all eternal, who they are and what they are like in form, [the Greeks] did not know these things until, as we say, yesterday or the day before (translated by Wickersham & Pozzi 1991: 5, quoted in Stafford 2013: 140).

When studying the ancient Greeks today, we are aided by a comparatively wide array of surviving literature on the basis of which to examine their gods; we can also look at many centuries of literary output simultaneously. Scholars like Wickersham and Pozzi (1991: 5) make the point that it is likely that the emergence of the works of Homer and Hesiod did a great deal to codify the depiction and understanding of the Greek gods into their most well-known form for

later generations. And while it will never be completely certain whether the extant Greek literature survives as a result of longevity, popularity, or simple luck, the era of Homer and Hesiod remains the earliest fixed point for any literary reference to the gods and divinities. Whether or not this literature influenced a change in the conception of deities or whether the Zeitgeist of that period encouraged such literature to be produced will remain a “chicken-and-an-egg” debate, but the pertinent fact here is that perception of the gods may have changed over time. While it would in all probability be difficult at any stage to describe a powerful deity in a new way that would not seem impious, such changes could conceivably be more easily ascribed to a liminal figure such as Heracles (Stafford 2013: 141). He is exceptional amongst the Greek heroes in terms of how he became a true demi-god. Placing the major events of his life in a timeline, as Stafford (2013: 142) does, gives us the following: Heracles was born a mortal, but with one divine parent. He underwent the struggles of a heroic life, and subsequently died. The manner of his death is well-recorded, and a version of it features within *The Trachiniae*, which is examined in section 4.1. Yet, unlike the majority of other heroes, Heracles was permitted to ascend to Olympus as a full god, and to reign for eternity from the heavens. He was even granted a new wife, Hebe (Youth), in the process. Stafford (2013: 142) also notes that the best any other hero could have hoped for up until this point was to be allowed onto the Elysium Fields, but the hero would be dead nonetheless. Section 2.3 above describes the ways in which hero cults were in essence cults of the dead. Yet, Heracles seems to defy this typical system. It is important to understand why Heracles was afforded this honour, and how it affected the Greeks’ worship of him.

The only other mythical Greek figure who underwent a process of deification similar to that of Heracles was Asclepius. The narrative of Asclepius’ life is described by Stafford (2013: 141). The son of Apollo and a mortal woman, Asclepius spent his life doing good deeds as a healer, and was eventually struck down by Zeus for attempting to raise the dead. Later cult worship of him from the sixth and fifth centuries BCE seems to have accorded him divine features, including several divine daughters, one of whom was Hygeia (Health). However, it is important to note that the information regarding Asclepius is obtained only from visual artefacts, from those placed in cult areas and on altars dedicated to him. Stafford (2013: 141) points out that in this, Asclepius is different from Heracles, whose apotheosis was recorded in literature in a more

comprehensive manner. Therefore there is no context for us fully to understand the details of the former's deification.

There is evidence to suggest that Heracles' deification was a later addition to the literature concerning him, which as Stafford (2013: 142) argues, might indicate that his portrayal as a god spread as a result of his growing popularity around Greece. Stafford (2013: 142) goes on to point out that inconsistencies in earlier literature might show evidence of this changing status of Heracles. Within *The Iliad*, for instance, Achilles²², while contemplating his death, still speaks of Heracles in the following manner:

Not even mighty Heracles escaped his doom,
even though he was much loved by lord Zeus, son of Cronos,
but fate overcame him, and the bitter anger of Hera (Stafford 2013: 142).²³

Heracles in this context is depicted in a way similar to the other heroes of that age: he is fated to die, no matter how astounding his deeds have been. One of the earliest known mentions of Heracles as divine, Stafford (2013: 143) points out, comes in *The Odyssey*, in the following manner, when Odysseus meets Heracles in the underworld:

Next I observed mighty Heracles,
his image; for he himself enjoys the feasts
of the immortal gods, and has as his wife fair-ankled Hebe,
child of great Zeus and golden-sandaled Hera (Stafford 2013: 143).²⁴

Stafford (2013: 143) argues that the most important word in that section is “image”, which in the original Greek is the word *eidolon*, in this context meaning a copy or duplicate, a shade of the original. This is a difficult concept to grasp, that Heracles is in both the underworld and in Olympus. According to Stafford (2013: 143), who echoes the arguments of several other scholars, this was a “patched-on” solution to the problem of Heracles being specifically mentioned as dead in the Homeric epics. As such, it is argued that these specific lines in this form are a later addition, included only when this contradiction needed to be resolved. Stafford

²² As mentioned above in Chapter 2.5, Achilles makes a similar reference to Heracles' death after Patrocles' death.

²³ *Il.* 18.117-119

²⁴ *Od.* 11.601-604

(2013: 143) argues that this double-status of Heracles, both immortal and dead, emerges in the works of Hesiod as well. Thus it is argued that Heracles' depiction in lines 950-955 of the *Theogony* seems to have been added awkwardly at a later stage. The fragmentary poem attributed to Hesiod, the *Catalogue of Women*, mentions this double-status even more explicitly (Stafford 2013: 144).

This ambiguity surrounding Heracles was found to be awkward even by authors in antiquity. Aristophanes and his peers in the fourth century BCE could comically hint at Heracles being a "bastard god," such as when Aristophanes does so in *The Birds* (ll.1649-70). Even at the later stage of the second century AD, authors such as Lucian found this problematic. Stafford (2013: 143) quotes his *Dialogues of the Dead* 16, where Lucian orchestrates a meeting between the Cynic Diogenes and Heracles in the underworld, where they both laugh at how preposterous the possibility of such a meeting is (Stafford 2013: 144). Later theories attempted to reconcile this view of Heracles, with a popular one being that the figure in the underworld was the "human" portion of Heracles, discarded when he ascended, and his divine spirit is what inhabits Olympus (Stafford 2013: 145). What all these ancient texts show is that it was understood, at least by authors and playwrights, that conceptions of Heracles had changed over time, and that this could be used for dramatic purposes in a piece of literature.

The above instances demonstrate that the transition of Heracles from hero to god definitely did occur, and that it was not necessarily an instant and smooth transition. The fact of his divinity does not seem to have been questioned; only the process through which this came to be.

The reasons for Heracles' apotheosis are not easily explained by the idea of popularity alone; rather, the apotheosis is the end result of the development of his role as an all-encompassing hero and educational model in Greek culture. He had the necessary levels of popularity (as shown in chapters 2.4 and 2.5), he was appreciated in all parts of Greece and he was renowned amongst all social classes as a preserver of aristocratic values and as a champion of the common man. The direct reasons for Heracles being allowed to ascend are named specifically by some as being the Twelve Labours²⁵ or by others as being the help Heracles rendered to the gods in the

²⁵ From Diodoros 4.10.7, quoted in Stafford (2013: 143).

Gigantomachy.²⁶ The specific reason is immaterial: what is important is that Heracles, someone so relatable and appreciated by the average person, was given the ultimate reward. Heracles' nature as a demi-god affected conceptions of him in every aspect of Greek society. Within cult worship there was a clear distinction between offerings and libations offered to the gods, and those dedicated to honoured ancestors and heroes. As Stafford (2013: 144) mentions, Heracles received both types, another way in which he was distinct from other cult figures.

What I have attempted to demonstrate in chapter 2 as a whole is how Heracles both embodies all the typical qualities of a hero and yet defies them at the same time. He is the standard model for any study of heroism, and yet he is also the exception to many of the defining rules. It is this apparently irreconcilable contradiction that provides much of the depth to Heracles' character and to his use in literature. This conflicting nature is a problem that was recognised even by the ancient Greeks, especially within the world of theatre, as shall be shown later.

Chapter 2 moves from describing in general terms the nature of Greek heroes and their function, to a more focused description of Heracles' specific characteristics. It is hoped that this information provides the groundwork for the arguments in the following chapters. Chapter 3 discusses the world of tragedy, the stage and the playwright, in order to illuminate the relevant concepts needed for a close examination of *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* in chapter 4.

²⁶ From Pindar, *Nemean*. 1.67-72, quoted in Stafford (2013: 143).

Chapter Three: Greek Tragic Theatre and Heracles

3.1. Interaction between Audience, Play, and Writer

Chapter 3 serves as a link between the general understanding of heroism obtained in chapter 2, and the reading of *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* offered in chapter 4. More specifically however, it will focus on tragic theatre and on the extent and manner in which Heracles was involved in Greek theatre. It is not necessary to gain in-depth understanding of how fifth century BCE Athenian theatre functioned in all its detail; however, several aspects should be examined for the purposes of this thesis. This is because the greater aim of this thesis is to show how and why two specific tragic plays gave unusual portrayals of Heracles, and it is impossible to appreciate fully why something is considered unusual if the norm is not understood first.

Section 3.1 is concerned with the purpose of plays in general. The following questions are considered: Why were they written? What did the playwright hope to achieve? How did the audience interact with plays, both as they were performed on stage and also as they were considered afterwards? In order to arrive at some answers to these questions, I use the work of Grube (1973) primarily. Grube's work is focused mostly on the subject of Euripidean drama, but he also presents lengthy background arguments regarding the purpose of the playwright and the theatre. Understanding these points was of paramount importance to his work, so Grube's arguments are exceedingly detailed on this subject.

The specific context under discussion here is that of the world of Athenian drama in the fifth century BCE. Grube (1973: 5) emphasises the important point that the so-called "Athenian Golden Age" was a period during which the power and influence of Athens, politically and culturally, spread over the greatest extent of Greece it would ever occupy. Furthermore, it is during this age that the theatre flourished to its fullest extent up until that point. This time period is preceded and followed by periods of warfare, as Grube (1973: 5) notes: in many ways, the Athenian Golden Age began as a result of the Greco-Persian Wars, and arguably contributed to the two Peloponnesian Wars that followed; the latter ending in complete Athenian defeat. It is within this cultural landscape that many of the most famous plays were written for an Athenian audience. Scholars such as Bates (1940: 4), Csapo & Slater (1995: 286) and Roselli (2011: 1-2)

have observed that the threat of war lurks almost constantly in the mind-set of the general playwright and Athenian citizen, and this emerges in the plays. As Grube (1973: 5) reminds us, Sophocles and Euripides were as much shaped by these periods of warfare as was any other citizen of Athens.

As Grube (1973: 29) points out, plays at this time were written for immediate consumption by an Athenian audience. The plays were attended by highborn and lowborn citizens, rich and poor, both philosophical and more practical-minded people, and this was a fact that was well known to the playwrights.²⁷ Because of this range of viewers, the subject matter and themes of the plays were usually written in a way that would appeal to the majority of the audience. Of course, a more educated and worldly member of the audience would understand more of the topics under discussion than others would (Grube 1973: 2). However, Grube (1973: 2) argues that, at least in political and philosophical terms, it seems to have been the desire (or more cynically viewed, simply the expressed desire) of many of the great minds at the top of society that all Athenians would have an understanding of current events, especially the events that were befalling their own city-state. Although it remains uncertain to what real extent theatre influenced the average citizen's knowledge of geopolitical events at the time, Grube (1973: 2) argues convincingly that playwrights in the Greek world did understand the educational potential of the theatre and appreciated how it could be used to communicate values or viewpoints to a mass audience.

Grube (1973: 28) includes a brief section on the difficulties for modern audiences in understanding Greek drama, even in a good translation. His discussion of the role of the playwright in society is extremely relevant to the arguments I make in this section. Grube (1973: 29) argues that the playwright was regarded as a teacher of the audience of his plays. The value of poetry as instructional for better living or better understanding of the world was paramount in this context. As a result, even though the playwright is able to be creative and expressive with his work, he cannot forget at any point that he is addressing a live audience. This becomes even more pertinent when we remember that an audience might contain a playwright's own peers in the theatre world as well, and that there was also the element of the theatrical contest. Grube

²⁷ A comical description of the typical audience at such events is made by Aristophanes in the *Peace*, which was performed at the City Dionysia in 421 BCE. This is portrayed by Roselli (2011: 1), who describes the scene in which two comic characters list who they see in the audience, including a crest-maker, sword-maker, sickle-maker, mattock-maker, spear-maker and farmers. This scene perhaps confirms the wide range of people watching.

(1973:29) elaborates that for such a reason, general flippancy without purpose was seemingly discouraged. The aim of this would be that neither the audience nor the gods should be unduly offended, as the theatrical festivals were always held in honour of the gods. Social tradition too placed limitation on the subject matter for plays. What was traditionally allowed, and what features in nearly every play, is a depiction of some mythic event, often involving a hero as a protagonist. However, adaptations of myths could be adjusted to some extent, even to the point of creating events that were not in harmony with the storylines of other plays. For example, as Grube (1973: 31) points out, a character such as Iphigenia might be killed in one play and saved by the gods in another; both plays were accepted as valid. Each play was taken individually, unless the playwright specifically designed them as a series within his own works. Another argument made by Grube (1973: 30) that is relevant to the analyses in chapter 4, is that history and the system of historical science as we understand it was not developed in this manner for the Greeks at this time. Outright historicity was nearly always abandoned when the story or philosophy behind the story needed to be embellished.

The conventions surrounding playwrights' adaptations of myths provide an important perspective on how radically differently Heracles is portrayed in the two plays examined here. As Silk (1985: 2) points out, *The Trachiniae* supposedly follows on chronologically from the events in the *Heracles*, and Heracles is accepted as being the same character in both plays, despite his diametrically opposed characterisations. Both Sophocles and Euripides embellished the myths they were adapting, changing them to suit their own purposes. But as the above theory shows, the inherent "truth" of the events they were recounting remained consistent with the earlier myths for the audience; both plays could be accepted as valid portrayals of Heracles, despite the diverging depictions of him.

Another major reason for having social convention dictate the limitations of the subject matter of plays was that the audience would be provided with a viewing of a myth with which they were already very familiar. The playwright could then go on to use this well-known myth in a way that allowed him to expand on certain aspects or emphasise particular specific points. Pozzi & Wickersham (1991: 3-5) illustrate this and show how this freedom in writing gave the playwright the opportunity to be creative or represent his own style, while still honouring the original myth. Playwrights would not have to create a large amount of background information to show who the

characters were and how they came to be in their current position, as those watching would already be familiar with these details and could simply be reminded of the most important points in brief. As touched on above, and as Pozzi & Wickersham (1991: 6-7) explain, both Euripides and Sophocles clearly established their own particular styles. To give one small example, Euripides is known for his realist aesthetic, while Sophocles is known for his strong characterisation and technical developments in theatre.

Another notable factor in a consideration of aspects of Greek theatre is the prominence of allegorical interpretations, as Grube (1973: 34) points out. Discussions and events that happened in plays were often naturally linked to events occurring currently in society, although it remains debatable as to which characters were meant to represent which real persons. Concerns of the playwright or the public in general were often metaphorically dressed up and presented under the guise of a mythic event, but with the true meaning only barely concealed (Grube 1973: 35). In order for this linking to be clear to the general audience, there was a great deal of anachronism in plays, with attitudes, features and societal structures from the present time being casually inserted into a far-off distant past many centuries before. Grube (1973: 36) argues that this was rarely a concern for the audience, being accepted as a necessary device for the lesson or discussion at hand.

Moreover, allegory was not used simply for the purposes of criticising or highlighting complaints, as might be expected. In many cases, it was employed as a tool for patriotic purposes, to re-emphasise the glory of Athens. It is difficult for modern scholars to link specific events with scenes in plays, but Grube (1973: 37) mentions some instances where this is possible. For example, *The Suppliants* is thought to address the issues the Athenians faced during a conflict with the Boeotians in 424 BCE, where the Boeotians denied the Athenians the right to bury their dead honourably. The resolution of the conflicts in the play features Athena descending to extract a treaty, and the manner in which this occurs leads Grube (1973: 37) to argue that this is perhaps representative of a real peace treaty that was accomplished.

Other plays simply seem to praise Athens in general. *The Children of Heracles* for example shows Athens as the moral champion of all Greeks, preserving universal values, honouring the gods, and protecting international law in a benevolent manner (Grube 1973: 38). Similarly, as might be expected for a jingoistic era, depictions of Sparta became increasingly critical over

time. Grube (1973: 38) refers to the *Andromache* to support this theory, quoting scenes in which Menelaus and Hermione are depicted as thorough villains, and giving examples of lines from near the end of the play, such as lines 445-450, and lines 595-601. The former set of lines describes how Spartan citizens are the least moral of all men, and are despised by all truly moral people. The latter set of lines berates Spartan women for being immodest, and criticises Spartan cultural activities at the same time. Grube (1973: 38) points out how such depictions in plays serve the dual purpose of praising Athenian values while at the same time pouring scorn on its most feared and detested neighbours who continue to challenge those values. This attitude towards Sparta at this time demonstrates a fine case of political double-think, such as is still apparent today when nationalism is observed. The Athenians despise the Spartan perspective on conflict and warfare, and see them as uncultured, violent ruffians who seek only to conquer and enforce hegemony. By contrast, they view themselves as the preservers of freedom and democracy; saviours standing firm against the tyranny of the Persians. In actuality, as Grube (1973: 39) reminds us, the Athenians had spent the previous decades building up an effective empire firmly under their rule, by cajoling, threatening, or conquering all those who disagreed with them.

In this manner, Grube (1973: 39) demonstrates how political issues were not separate from the world of theatre, and the playwright was not exempt from patriotic thoughts and shared ideologies. He was, always, one of the public himself, and therefore shared the same concerns as his audience. The playwright was not a distant observer, and much of Grube's (1973: 40) work on this subject argues for how the push-and-pull relationship between the artist who gives and his audience who receives was felt immediately and very strongly in Greek theatre.

This section shows something of the extent to which the playwright, his text, and the audience all impacted on each other. None of these groups approached the theatre in an isolated vacuum. Rather, the world around them, with its social and political events, impacted on the structure and purpose of plays. Even if the subject matter seemed far removed from the real world, it was more than likely in some way commenting on what was happening in the present day. It is important to understand these points before approaching the study of *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles*, because both of those plays and their playwrights are affected in the ways described in this section, and that in turn influences how Heracles is depicted. Studying the two portrayals of

Heracles in order to determine specific aspects of them is central to this thesis, therefore making the insight gained in this section essential.

The following section is intended to present an overview of certain theatrical functions and structures while also examining tragedy as a typical genre in Greek theatre. An understanding of the development of tragedy and its importance in Greek society provides essential background to the analyses in chapter 4.

3.2. Tragic Subject Matter in Greek Theatre

Before addressing the discussion of Heracles as a tragic figure and commencing the exploration in this thesis of unique aspects of his portrayal as a tragic figure, some thought has to be given to ancient perceptions of Greek tragedy²⁸, as far as these can be determined. This section will also highlight one of the central issues regarding Heracles in this thesis: why was he so distinctly not a tragic figure, before *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles*? The first known and probably the most influential discussion of Greek theatre and literary theory was written by Aristotle circa 335 BCE, in the *Poetics*.²⁹

Concepts from the *Poetics* that are important for the analyses in chapter 4 are the theories regarding the emotional functions of tragedy. Tragedy had a long and detailed history, and *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* in the fifth century BCE were firmly placed in a tradition that supported the manner in which tragedy would be presented. Tragedy typically takes a hero and places him (or her) within an emotionally exposed, raw, suffering position. It is important to understand why this was considered necessary for the audience on an emotional level.

²⁸ It is important to remember the link between theatre and the cult of Dionysus, as Brockett & Hildy (2003: 13) highlight. This thesis has commented on the link between cults and theatre before, albeit between heroes and tragedy, rather than divinities. As mentioned in Section 2.3, scholars like Kerenyi (1959: 14) argue that the way in which tragic heroes were portrayed on stage was an evolution or an extension of the cult worship practice of a dead or suffering hero. From this argument, tragic theatre is simply cult ritual performed in a public space. Similarly, the possible impact of Dionysus' cult on tragic performances should be acknowledged. An interesting debate mentioned by Brockett & Hildy (2003: 13) also presents itself, about which cult was more prominently in focus here: at what point are these performances intended to honour the individual heroes, and at what point are they intended to honour Dionysus alone?

²⁹ Even modern, well-researched books on the subject matter of the origin of Greek theatre theory, such as Csapo & Slater (1995), rely heavily on information gained from the *Poetics*. It is an invaluable primary source for this reason, although the difficulties of interacting with it should be kept in mind at all times.

As mentioned before, a central question addressed by this thesis is why in all this time (as section 3.3 shows in more depth), no plays before *The Trachiniae* and later, the *Heracles*, had featured Heracles as a tragic victim or as a suffering figure. Within these two plays, he finally is depicted in the role of a suffering hero. By examining some of the theory behind the function of such a figure in a play, this thesis will gain important information for the subsequent discussions of why Heracles might have been denied these roles earlier. This thesis will also explore the way in which Heracles' assuming of the suffering hero role within *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* provides vital insight into his character.

Within his theorising on tragedy in the *Poetics*, Aristotle lays out his hypothesis of the function of tragedy, using two main concepts: *mimesis* and *catharsis*. In the original Greek, these words translate as “imitation” and “cleansing” respectively. In the *Poetics* (1449b, 24-29) Aristotle states:

Tragedy is, therefore, an imitation of a noble and complete action...which through compassion and fear produces purification of the passions (translated by Kenny 2013: 24-29)

The implication is that on stage human affairs are imitated, whereas the emotional cleansing occurs within individual members of the audience observing the events. Aristotle's specific meaning remains the subject of debate, but scholars have suggested various interpretations. Lear (1992), for example, states that "the most sophisticated view of catharsis provides an education for the emotions... Tragedy provides us with the appropriate objects towards which to feel pity or fear." Gregory (2005: 405) argues against these simple definitions of catharsis by other scholars, claiming that catharsis serves a function as a catalyst in transforming pity and fear into more enjoyable emotions. He goes on to say:

Katharsis, on this reading, will denote the overall ethical benefit that accrues from such an intense yet fulfilling integrated experience. Exempt from the stresses that accompany pity and fear in social life, the audience of tragedy can allow these emotions an uninhibited flow that ... is satisfyingly attuned to its contemplation of the rich human significance of a well-plotted play. A katharsis of this kind is not reducible to either 'purgation' or 'purification.'

The above is intended to show two things: firstly, that tragedy serves a purpose alongside functioning as entertainment, and secondly, that the aforesaid purpose and the functions of tragedy are still understandable to a modern audience on an emotional level. The first point is important because it means that in a study of *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles*, it must be kept in mind that the tragic elements within the plays are designed for a purpose. It may be impossible to know for certain precisely what those purposes were, as intended by their playwrights. However, in an analysis of Heracles as a character within the plays, the question of why certain tragic events happen to Heracles in the manner in which they do becomes far more meaningful when the possible purposes of these are kept in mind at all times. The second point, that a modern audience is able to comprehend the function of tragedy, is useful to acknowledge because it means that a modern audience can still appreciate the devices in Greek tragedy that were designed to play on viewers' emotions. Full immersion in a culture is not necessary for an understanding of certain shared human concerns.

Opstelten³⁰ (1952: 24) discusses a number of important aspects of the Greek context within which tragedy took shape, pointing primarily to the pervasive force of pessimism in Greek tragedy. He defines two concepts: pessimism on stage, which functions as a mood or aura surrounding all the characters and events; and the "tragic sense," which is a consequence of action. The tragic sense causes an event which has to be resolved within the play and often encourages heroism, in the form of a hero character acting for their own preservation (as the character of Ajax does), or heroically surrendering to something greater than themselves (as the character of Antigone does). Opstelten (1952: 24) argues that pessimism and the tragic sense do not necessarily mean the same thing; one is a mood and the other is a cause of action. The tragic and the pessimistic do not necessarily overlap. Opstelten (1952: 25) shows that it is possible for the term "optimistic tragedian" to be realistic rather than oxymoronic, as he defines Aeschylus' steadfast belief in the justice of the gods as being indicative of optimism, despite the tragic themes within his plays. Opstelten (1952: 25) claims that these two concepts can appear at the same time, and when they do, they can combine in a form that is demonstrative of Greek culture as a whole. Tragic optimism alongside a mood of pessimism in tragedy can be seen in the

³⁰ Opstelten is a comparatively old source; however, his specific focus on the relationship between Greek culture and tragedy is rarely explored to the same extent or quality in later sources. Many of these later sources that might tackle a similar subject build on the same work as Opstelten, but lead the discussion in different directions, beyond what is needed for this thesis.

analyses of *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles*. In both plays, Heracles himself is faced by these issues, and their resolution, achieved in different ways in each play, provides interesting insight into the differing ways in which Sophocles and Euripides approached similar themes in their plays.

Opstelten (1952: 26) further argues that this combination of mood and action creates a “tragic conflict” that illuminates something of the cosmological perspective held by the Greeks. In his view, tragic conflict is the end result of strife between human will and divine power. This thesis describes tragic conflict as reflecting the fear created when humans are faced with the definitive knowledge that all their grand works, hopes and dreams are at the mercy of capricious forces which they will never fully understand nor can hope to control. This, Opstelten argues, is the essence of what he calls pessimism in the Greek world. The conflict created between mortals and the unknowable gods is a strong theme in both *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles*.

Opstelten’s (1952: 27) overall argument is that this emotional function explains why tragic heroes were a necessity on stage, and why they appeared so often. These heroes confront the same concerns and fears as those faced by all Greeks, but their personal restraint of these fears and their lack of submission to them, made them both admirable and enjoyable to watch. Pessimism was considered a negative trait when it resulted in complaint, but the tragic hero stifled his complaints and acted in a manner that showed his heroic virtue. Opstelten (1952: 77) concludes by arguing that the process of being faced by problems, of questioning themselves, and then rising above the problems to overcome them, is what made the heroes admirable to their audience.

The above information in section 3.2 points to the emotional functions of tragedy and the fact that these had a purpose. This section also explores the role heroes played in acting out these emotional needs for an audience, and the admiration created in the audience for the heroes as a result. Earlier sections, such as section 2.4, 2.5, and 2.6, have shown in various ways the widespread appeal of Heracles. Taking this into consideration against the background of the information in this section, it becomes clear that Heracles would have served extremely well in the role of a suffering, tragic hero. His omission from this role for such a long period of time is therefore notable, when other heroes who were not as well-known or popular frequently carried

out this function. The reasons for this will be understood more clearly from the analyses conducted in chapter 4.

The final section of chapter 3 below examines some of the other roles in which Heracles was cast prior to *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles*. It will show the range of portrayals of him outside that of tragic hero, indicating that in every other way Heracles was regarded as perfectly suitable subject matter for inclusion on stage.

3.3. Heracles as a Theatre Theme Prior to *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles*

Now that the function, purpose and role of the theatre (and of tragedy specifically) have been described in a general context, it will be of great benefit to understand the position Heracles held in theatre prior to the two plays examined in chapter 4. This is to facilitate a greater appreciation for what the two primary plays under discussion in this thesis did that was so different from their predecessors in regard to the portrayal of Heracles. It is only possible to see how unusual and influential *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* were through making reference to earlier works featuring Heracles.

Silk (1985: 5) argues that when Greek theatre is taken as a whole, Heracles stands out as one of the most frequently-used heroes, which is demonstrative of his overall social popularity. His role in Greek comedy grew and became more expansive over time, and he features prominently for all writers of this genre. His appearances in Aristophanes' *Birds* and *Frogs*, for example, demonstrate this. He was also, as Silk (1985: 6) claims, the most popular character in Attic satyr-drama, appearing in the satyr plays of all three of the great tragedians. Elsewhere in the Greek world, he was the mainstay of Epicharmus' mythological burlesques in Sicily, early in the fifth century BCE (Silk 1985: 6). In these portrayals, again, as in Attic satyr-drama and in the works of playwrights such as Aristophanes, Heracles is depicted as a rather one-dimensional, laughable figure. He demonstrates more gluttony than heroic virtue, and inspires parody rather than awe. Such appearances are, in Silk's (1985: 7) opinion, reflective in theme of the earlier folk tales involving Heracles.

It is within the realm of the most acclaimed theatre genre, tragedy, that Heracles' appearances become more notable. As Stafford (2013: 77) demonstrates, Heracles featured in some of the earliest known fragmentary tragedies, such as two plays by the early fifth century BCE tragedian

Phrynichos, the *Alkestis* and the *Antaeus*. Stafford (2013: 77) further argues that the tragedian Aeschylus probably featured Heracles in two plays of which only the names remain to us: his *Alkmene* and *Children of Heracles*. Heracles also had a supporting role in the Prometheus Trilogy, being mentioned in an important context in *Prometheus Unbound* (Stafford 2013: 78). While their authorship and even whether the dramas formed part of a trilogy remain debateable, Heracles most probably did appear in these plays. Stafford (2013: 78) points to Heracles' latest mention in any work of Aeschylus as being in the *Agamemnon* of 458 BCE, lines 1040-1041, where Stafford (2013: 78) quotes Klytemnestra urging Cassandra to accept her fate as a captive. Heracles is used as a point of reference here, in the words: "for even Alkmene's son, they say, once endured being sold, in spite of the slave's barley cake rations."

Silk's (1985: 4) argument is that within all of these plays, (as well as, for example, Sophocles' *Athamas*, Euripides' *Auge*, and Critias' *Pirithous*), Heracles functions as a saviour force, rather than as a character in his own right. He fulfils a function of the narrative, and does not act as a *persona* in his own right. The most obvious example of this noted by Silk (1985: 4) is in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, where Heracles serves as the literal *deus ex machina*, resolving all events and concluding the drama of the play. This way in which Heracles was typically seen and treated as a figure was touched on in section 2.5 above, and is an interesting point to remember when studying *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* which deviate so far from such typical portrayals of Heracles.

As Silk (1985: 5) says, Heracles appears everywhere and in every position on stage within Greek theatre except that of the tragic hero, which is exceedingly unusual for a hero of Heracles' status. Various theories have been presented in modern scholarship to account for this issue, but the problem is not approached in enough depth by many. As Silk (1985: 6) lays out these various theories, the problems with them become clear. Wilamowitz (1895: 69) argued that Heracles was a Dorian hero, featuring in lost Dorian epics as a hero specific to that framework and making him unsuitable to be used in a larger Greek context. However, this fails to account for Heracles' fame as a Pan-Hellenic hero. Jebb's (1892: xxif) theory is that Heracles' former appearances as a burlesque hero made it difficult to transform him into the subject of serious portrayals, and that in any event, his myths did not lend themselves well to tragic theatre. Silk (1985: 6) also describes how this second point of Jebb's has been emphasised by other scholars, who state that

the majority of literature featuring Heracles concerns the slaying of monsters, which does not function well on stage. However, as Silk (1985: 6) points out, the problem with this theory is that playwrights regularly change and update myths as necessary to accommodate such issues, so this argument is not fully satisfactory. Finally, Viktor Ehrenberg makes a claim that begins to address the issue more completely. He states that the problem was Heracles' divinity and that furthermore:

[i]t was usual with the Greeks to make fun of their gods, and Hermes the thief, the sensual and intoxicating Aphrodite, or the voluptuary Dionysus were as old and as real as their severe and sublime counterparts. But no god, however much he might suffer, was ever tragic. Heracles, whether hero or glutton, was always superhuman and therefore essentially untragic (Ehrenberg, quoted in Silk 1985: 5).

However, as Silk (1985: 5) points out, even this theory fails to grasp the larger issue: Heracles was not only a god, nor a man, nor simply a hero. He was all of them, and this thesis will use the arguments of Silk and many other scholars as support to show that this complexity in his character is what affected his appearances on stage to the greatest extent. The aim of this thesis is to consolidate the argument constructed by Silk (1985) by combining his perspective with that of the comparatively few other authors (e.g. Hinden 1973, Fuqua 1980, Papadopoulou 2005) who recognised this as a problem and attempted to address it in their own works. This problem as a whole remains relatively under-explored by most scholars. Furthermore, this thesis hopes to contribute to their arguments by contextualising the plays to a greater extent than has been done in their works. This is accomplished in chapters 2 and 3, where Greek heroism and Heracles' place within it, as well as his place in the world of theatre, are contextualised. Finally, most of the scholars who do approach this issue within these plays, do so by focusing primarily on only one: either *The Trachiniae* or the *Heracles*. This thesis hopes to contribute to an enhanced understanding of the purpose and function of both these plays through the comparative reading offered here. The ways in which they are comparable, and the ways in which they differ while addressing the same themes, give valuable insight into the overall portrayal of Heracles by these playwrights.

The above sections have all begun to demonstrate the importance of the questions raised regarding Heracles' portrayal in tragedy that this thesis aims to investigate. The analyses that

attempt to explore these questions and others will examine the two most important tragic plays featuring Heracles, *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles*, in some depth in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Analysing the Plays

4.1. Introduction to the Plays

Chapter 4 as a whole is primarily focused on highlighting selected aspects of the portrayal of Heracles in *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles*, *The Trachiniae* in section 4.2 and the *Heracles* in section 4.3. This section serves not only as an introduction to both plays, but also to emphasise the parallels between the two plays. The most important purpose of this section is to bring into focus the primary goals of the reading of each play presented here.

Most major academic works focusing on Heracles and these two tragedies have approached the topic from one of two perspectives: either as primarily a study on the playwright and his style, in which one of these plays happens to feature as part of his body of work³¹, or as a more in-depth study of one of these specific plays.³² Although both of these approaches provide perspectives that are invaluable for many areas of this thesis, ultimately they are providing very different arguments. The aim of this thesis is to prioritise Heracles for study and even more specifically, to focus on Heracles as a tragic figure. As noted on numerous occasions, the two plays remain the first known works to approach Heracles in this manner. This means that it is essential to keep in mind how both plays portray their Heracles, to see the similarities and differences in their depictions of an unusual (for their context) suffering and tragic Heracles. The entirety of chapter 4 examines specific elements and scenes within the plays, individual characters and how they interact with Heracles, and various arguments and questions surrounding the plays. It is important to remember that Heracles, as Papadopoulou (2005: 4) also argues, remains the centre of all events in these dramas, even when he is not on stage. The characters react because of him, they speak about him, and even when he is not doing anything actively, Heracles to varying degrees is the cause of the drama that unfolds.

The implications of the similarities and differences between the two plays are discussed in depth in chapter 5, when it is possible to reflect on the discussions offered in chapter 4. At this stage, only certain important parallels need to be highlighted. Each play begins with Heracles

³¹ E.g. Bates 1930; Bates 1940; Opstelten 1952; Burnett 1971; Grube 1973.

³² E.g. Hinden 1973; Hallaran 1988; Holt 1989; Papadopoulou 2005.

journeying away from home, and he does not appear on stage until a significant way through the events of the drama. The opening dialogue in each is handled by Heracles' family, most notably his wife. Both plays presuppose an initial source of tragedy which is resolved halfway through the play, after which a new source of tragedy is suddenly introduced. In both plays, this second source of tragedy is Heracles' undoing. Finally, there is a point which only a few scholars have made,³³ and upon which this thesis hopes to build: both plays feature an archaic Heracles and a contemporary Heracles concurrently, within a single character. The Heracles in each play embodies this in similar ways. Before Heracles arrives on stage, he is spoken of in exceptionally laudatory terms (for the most part). He is depicted as well-nigh perfect, and is adored for his many great deeds which are listed repeatedly to emphasise this point. However, when Heracles does arrive on stage, both plays show - in different ways - that Heracles in fact possesses multiple faults, and is nowhere near as perfect as we have been led to expect. In both cases, Heracles himself recognises this to some extent: he sees his life's achievements and his strength undone, and all he can do now is recall his more glorious days, through endlessly restating his prior achievements. This internal conflict in each play is a result of the playwrights' efforts to reconcile in one complex character attributes ascribed over centuries to the mythical figure of Heracles.

This is an extremely important point to remember throughout these discussions because, as shall be seen, it points to one of the major reasons why these plays of Sophocles and Euripides may have been considered unusual. They have taken the bold step of incorporating in one character aspects of both the more flawed Heracles of an older period and the moralised pillar of justice of the contemporary era. The two plays show in various ways how both aspects may form part of an honest portrayal of Heracles, and how both can contribute to a deeper understanding of his persona. This leads to a richly nuanced characterisation. As chapters 4.2 and 4.3 demonstrate throughout, the dichotomy present in almost every area of Heracles' character serves a purpose and perhaps contributes to an understanding of why earlier plays never portrayed a suffering Heracles.

The discussions of the two plays in chapters 4.2 and 4.3 follow a similar structure. Firstly, an overview section is provided, with the background and a short plot summary. The next section

³³ E.g. Fuqua 1980; Silk 1985; Papadimitriopolous 2008.

demonstrates how and in which specific ways Heracles is atypically portrayed, in comparison to other depictions of him up until this point. The aim of this is to demonstrate the extent of these plays' departure from earlier conventions of interpreting Heracles on stage. The final and most extensive section will show how different elements within the play are used to heighten the tragedy already present. This serves to further illuminate the value of *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* as examples of how a tragedy typically treats its tragic hero. In both of these latter two sections, the focus is on the conflict between the opposing characteristics within Heracles himself. This includes the divide between his past and present selves, and also the divergence generated by his possessing both human and divine aspects, mentioned in section 2.6. This chapter hopes to enhance an understanding of why these plays are the only ones to tackle this subject matter in this manner, and why they are considered unusual in the way they do so³⁴.

Sophocles' *Trachiniae* is analysed before Euripides' *Heracles* because, as far as can be determined, that is the order in which they were written. The time of composition for *The Trachiniae* is considered to be anywhere from 450-430 BCE (Whitman 1966: 3; Hoey 1979: 220) and the *Heracles* is typically understood to have followed sometime between 425-416 BCE (Stafford 2013: 82). In narrative terms, the order is reversed, with the events of *The Trachiniae* taking place sometime after those represented in the *Heracles*. However, both narratives deviate from other versions to suit the specific needs of their respective authors, and there is no indication in either play that the events in one relate to the other. It is therefore more beneficial to study them in the chronological order of their writing, if only to see how some similar concepts may have been adapted or re-shaped in the later play. Both plays comprise complete, coherent narratives, and so do not suffer in any way from being placed in this order for examination. Rather, any impact that the earlier play may have had on the later one may be felt more clearly.

³⁴ These plays were considered unusual by later scholars, and as far as their unusual status within their own context can be established, it can only be said that no later plays addressed Heracles in this manner.

4.2. Sophocles' *The Trachiniae*

4.2.1. Overview

Section 4.2.1 provides a short overview of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, both a brief plot summary and a description of the contemporary events surrounding the play.³⁵ This is in order to provide some context for the discussion that follows. *The Trachiniae* was perhaps one of the least-studied of Sophocles' plays throughout antiquity and into the modern era, gaining wider interest for academics only comparatively recently, as Hoey (1979: 218) demonstrates. The reasons for this might become apparent as an examination of the play continues. Although *The Trachiniae* is unusual, it has also been called a fine example of typical Sophoclean style (Bates 1940: 17). More significantly for this thesis however, the drama is one of the most important sources of information in any study of Heracles as a figure. Holt (1989: 79) argues that it is important to understand the position of this play within the development of the Heracles myth at its time of writing. Holt claims that in general terms, the noble attributes of Heracles were emphasised especially from the second half of the fifth century BCE onwards: where once Heracles' physical strength had been his most important feature, from this point his moral strength was increasingly emphasised. Heracles was made into more of a man of the *polis*. Whereas previous depictions had emphasised his Labours, now his reward and exaltation in the afterlife became the focus. Heracles was used more in moral allegory than in stories about his actions. This trend is difficult to place in a timeline against *The Trachiniae*, especially considering the uncertainty around the date of the play's writing, but as Holt (1989: 79) claims, it is possible that Sophocles is commenting on a trend which he saw emerging. As mentioned in section 4.1, an examination of how this play shows the conflicting aspects within Heracles' character, and how that inner dichotomy brings dissension and tragedy, serves to demonstrate how well Heracles functions as a tragic hero.

³⁵ The translation used throughout the majority of this section is Bagg and Scully (2011), aside from the initial plot summary, where Theodoridis (2007) is used for its prose style. It is important before any analyses of ancient texts to acknowledge at least a few of the difficulties that will be encountered. My analyses, for example, are affected by the following: a lack of full immersion in the context and culture of the Greek world; the fact that most Greek drama today is read, rather than seen performed; the difficulties faced by engaging with works that are in a translated form; and a break in connection with most idioms, metaphoric imagery and larger socio-political references.

There is some difference of opinion about the point in Sophocles' career at which he composed *The Trachiniae*, with two main schools of thought on the matter. The first, discussed by Whitman (1966: 3), argues that *The Trachiniae* is thematically similar to *Oedipus the King*, written by Sophocles around 430 BCE. Furthermore, Whitman argues that *The Trachiniae* borrows from Euripides' style of composition, which was emerging around the period of 430 BCE. However, other scholars such as Hoey (1979: 220) posit that a date closer to 450 BCE is more likely. This argument is based on the thematic comparisons which are possible between several events in the plays of Sophocles, and those of Aeschylus that were being written at this time. Hoey's opinion is that Sophocles was either responding to elements within Aeschylus' plays, or commenting on them. Examples listed by Hoey (1979: 220) include the similarities between the major female characters in *The Trachiniae* and Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, or the philosophical similarities between the *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Trachiniae*.³⁶

Before the focus is narrowed to specific elements of the portrayal of Heracles, it is useful to provide a short summary of the major events of the plot. The play begins with Deianeira, wife of Heracles and mother of his children, waiting for his return home. From the dialogue it becomes clear that Heracles is almost always away on adventures (Theodoridis 2007: lines 28-30); Deianeira loves him deeply, but fears the emotional gulf between them, and also worries about a prophecy that claims the end of Heracles is near (Theodoridis 2007: lines 81-82). She sends their eldest son Hyllos to see if he can find his father (Theodoridis 2007: line 92). Soon after Hyllos leaves, a messenger arrives to tell Deianeira that Heracles is returning soon, victorious, and has only stopped to make the appropriate offerings and give thanks to the gods (Theodoridis 2007: line 180). Heracles' herald, Lichas, arrives with an assortment of slaves, including Iole, the beautiful former princess of Oechalia. Lichas tells of Heracles' exploits: Heracles assaulted the city of Oechalia because its king, Eurytus, had enslaved him, and after escaping from his bonds, Heracles vowed to seek justice for his insult. He destroyed the city and as vengeance took Iole (Theodoridis 2007: lines 249-281). However, soon after this, the messenger contradicts Lichas' story, saying that Heracles destroyed the city purely out of lust for Iole (Theodoridis 2007: lines 338-380).

³⁶ Both Whitman (1966) and Hoey (1979) are comparatively older sources, but these two scholars present a gap of about 20 years in the dates they suggest for the composition of *The Trachiniae*, and most other scholars I have studied for this purpose seem comfortable using a date between one of these two.

Deianeira is driven to despair at the thought that Heracles will choose a younger woman over her now, and she desperately seeks for a way to keep him loyal to her (Theodoridis 2007: line 531). She remembers her first encounter with Heracles, when the centaur Nessus sought to assault her and Heracles rescued her, slaying the beast with his arrows. With his dying breath, Nessus told her to take and keep some of his blood, which (unbeknownst to her) has now mixed with the Hydra's blood on Heracles' arrow. Nessus tells her that if Heracles' love for her is ever in doubt, a powerful love potion can be made from this fluid. Now, Deianeira takes the saved blood, and places it all over a robe which she wraps up and instructs Lichas to take to Heracles as a gift (Theodoridis 2007: lines 552-590).

Almost immediately, Deianeira begins to have doubts about her actions (Theodoridis 2007: lines 672-673). Hyllos arrives, confirming those doubts, telling her that as soon as Heracles put the robe on, it attached to him and began burning him unceasingly (Theodoridis 2007: lines 740-810). At first Hyllos believes Deianeira did this on purpose, and he berates her (lines 815-820). Realising too late that she had been duped, Hyllos cannot stop his mother from committing suicide (Theodoridis 2007: lines 871-930). At this point, Heracles is brought on stage for the first time, on a stretcher (Theodoridis 2007: line 965). He is in extreme agony but rages against Deianeira, demanding that she be brought to him (Theodoridis 2007: lines 1051-1064). The remainder of the play primarily portrays interactions between Heracles, in deep anger and anguish, and Hyllos, his loving son. Hyllos explains that Deianeira was innocent, and Heracles realises the prophecy has been fulfilled and that his own death is imminent (Theodoridis 2007: lines 1147-1151). Heracles speaks on a variety of topics. He bemoans being undone by a woman, and mourns his own loss of masculinity and strength. He feels cheated by the gods after his many years of service. He is angry at the world, and feels that now he is reduced to nothing. During this, he lists at great length many of his most prominent achievements (Theodoridis 2007: lines 1051-1112). Eventually, something of the old Heracles asserts itself, and he orders his son to swear an oath to him, without knowing what it is (Theodoridis 2007: lines 1179-1190). Heracles persuades Hyllos to do this both on the grounds of being his son, and also because it is his dying wish. When Hyllos eventually agrees, Heracles makes his request: Hyllos is to burn him on a funeral pyre, and once that is done, he is to take Iole as a bride (Theodoridis 2007: lines 1206-1249). Hyllos does not want to be involved in the deaths of both his parents in one day, and Heracles spends some time convincing him before Hyllos finally agrees (Theodoridis 2007: lines

1249-1251). The play ends with Hyllos ordering the sacrificial pyre to be built, before they all proceed up to the top of the mountain for the final rites (Theodoridis 2007: lines 1260-1266).³⁷

The core narrative in *The Trachiniae* is, as seen, that of the death of Heracles. Like most dramatic plots at the time, as mentioned in section 3.1, this was taken from well-known stories already in circulation. However, Sophocles made two major alterations to the narrative. Firstly, while Deianeira was known in myth to be Heracles' second wife, she did not feature very prominently in literature before this point, as far as we can tell (Bagg and Scully 2011: 100). Her prominence in this play is an innovation by Sophocles. Secondly, the play does not contain the actual moment of Heracles' death or apotheosis, as many other depictions of this myth did, the importance of which is pointed out by Hinden (1973: 177). This play ends before these moments were to happen, leading to much scholarly debate about the impact of this omission. This debate is explored more fully throughout the remainder of section 4.2. The effects of these two major changes on the play are notable. In earlier literature and artwork, as Hinden (1973: 176) describes, the focus of this myth (the conflict between Heracles and Deianeira that led to his eventual death) had always been on depicting the death and funeral of Heracles, with the familial conflict aspect taking a distant second place in terms of importance. However, Hinden (1973: 177) argues that Sophocles' version is more of a family drama and tragedy, and the important points here are the interactions between Heracles and his family. This is especially remarkable when Heracles does not even meet Deianeira on stage at any point during the play, which in itself serves a thematic purpose. Hinden (1973: 177) argues further that the importance of Sophocles having Heracles actually interact with his family is immense, in respect of what it shows of what Heracles has become at this point.

While the primary subject matter of the play remains Heracles himself, the major portion of the action does not feature his presence on stage, focusing rather on people talking about Heracles. Both his good and his bad aspects are described by various individuals, and this is made

³⁷ The translation of the text used up until this point was Theodoridis (2007). I regard Theodoridis (2007) as a secondary source rather than a primary source, because the author has taken extensive steps to modify, adjust, and adapt the original Ancient Greek text into a heavily paraphrased prose form. Although lines are still used, (as opposed to pages), this version of the text is useful primarily in this context for the ease in which it conveys the plot of the play, which I believe was the purpose it was translated in to this form at all. From this point on, in the remainder of this section, the poetic translation of Bagg and Scully (2011) will be used, as it more accurately captures the original poetic form of *The Trachiniae*, with all the original imagery translated as precisely and extensively as possible.

especially clear when many of Deianeira's lines concerning Heracles and the Chorus' lines concerning Heracles are contrasted, for example, when Deianeira speaks in lines 30-36, and when the Chorus speaks in lines 100-105. While the Chorus is always full of exceeding praise for Heracles, Deianeira's lines are more measured and full of doubt about his character. When Heracles himself does appear on stage, in line 983, it is exceedingly difficult for his character to live up to what has been spoken about him previously. He is not the great monster-slaying and civilising hero he has been made out to be by both this play and other literature, nor is he the fearsome destroyer of cities that have wronged him, nor the loving and caring husband that Deianeira claims him to be. Heracles perhaps was all of those things at one point, but he is now someone much diminished.³⁸ Heracles' inability to accept the changes in himself and adapt to these changes is where a lot of tragedy begins for him, as will be expanded upon in chapters 4.2.2 and 4.2.3.

The Trachiniae is ultimately then as powerful and effective a tragedy as could be found, because tragic events unfold not as the result of some contrived cosmic disturbance, but rather as the consequence of basic human fallibility. That this would lead to the death of the greatest hero, someone semi-divine and destined for full divinity, is an irony in itself. Hinden (1973: 178) characterises the overall theme of the play as "defeat". Hinden's (1973: 178) argument is that there is also no resolution in a theatrical sense: no *deus ex machina* arrives to provide any respite or comfort for the suffering characters, the survivors are merely left to pick up the pieces of their shattered lives as best they can; and the dead are not rescued or transported to freedom, they simply die.

But, as shall be shown in the following sections in more depth, this serves to emphasise that ultimately the tragedy of this play derives from family drama transpiring between extremely well-actualised characters. The strength of the characters is that they are portrayed with very real human concerns, emotions and fears, and Heracles especially is crafted as a highly-nuanced and interesting character. Here, Heracles is brought down from the lofty heights where he elicited nothing but constant adoration, and the audience is reminded that for all his unquestionably admirable qualities, Heracles is certainly not above ordinary human emotions or actions and is as

³⁸ Both Fuqua (1980: 55) and Silk (1985: 9) expand this point in their arguments for how *The Trachiniae* functions partly as a bridging narrative for Heracles: from being the archaic hero of older literature into being the newer hero of 5th century Athenian society.

susceptible as anyone else to human failings. Hinden (1973: 178) reasons that it was in fact because of Heracles' greatness, that his failings would be correspondingly all the more notable.

Section 4.2.2 discusses in more detail how the portrayal of Heracles in *The Trachiniae* is an atypical one. This is followed by section 4.2.3, in which various specific points from the play are examined to demonstrate the manner in which *The Trachiniae* makes Heracles into a typical suffering, tragic hero.

4.2.2. *The Atypical Portrayal of Heracles*

One of the greatest strengths of *The Trachiniae* is its simultaneous presentation of Heracles both atypically in terms of how he had been depicted before, and typically in respect of a traditional tragic stage hero. The play shows how well and successfully Heracles functions on stage as a tragic hero, while also demonstrating how Heracles' own unique qualities make him an exceptionally fascinating character when depicted in this manner. For scholarship purposes, there is value in understanding how this play both honours the traditional depictions of Heracles and at the same time demonstrates how his character could be approached in a (as far as could be determined) new and ground-breaking way. Section 4.2.2 focuses on the atypical way in which Heracles is portrayed in *The Trachiniae*, before section 4.2.3 looks specifically at how he is depicted as a tragic, suffering hero. In 4.2.3, some of the general points raised in 4.2.2 will be expanded upon. I argue in this section that the primary way in which Heracles is atypically portrayed is in the play's graphic demonstration of the internal conflicts of Heracles as being central to his characterisation. Furthermore, it is argued that these internal conflicts were primarily caused by the dual natures of Heracles. Ultimately, Heracles here is atypical compared to other portrayals of him, because in this play Sophocles highlights the dichotomy rather than ignoring it.

Heracles' internal conflicts manifest in two distinct ways throughout the play. The first is the incompatibility between Heracles' human and divine aspects, and how these remain permanently present but estranged within the single individual. This was discussed to some extent in section 2.6. The second way internal conflict affects Heracles is in his personal struggle to reconcile how he used to be with the way he is now. As shall be shown, throughout the play Heracles constantly reminisces, or seeks to return to past glories. That past, glorious time is contrasted often with the

tragic circumstances in which he finds himself in the present.³⁹ It may be argued, as Holt (1989: 80) does, that this is the way the play addresses the issue of how Heracles had been portrayed for centuries preceding the fifth century BCE. The Heracles of earlier centuries was different in many ways from what he has become in the minds of the audience now. As Holt (1989: 80) says of this topic:

The play examines the old, rude, self-assertive brand of heroism, criticizes it in the light of civilized values and the cooperative virtues, and yet in some ways upholds it. Sophocles senses the spell of the old and exposes his audience to it, being unwilling to see heroic greatness submerged completely beneath civilized refinement.

In respect of the divide between Heracles' human and divine aspects, it was not unusual to show Heracles as having both those elements within his character. Heracles is portrayed across a range of plays and even in other depictions as a mortal hero or a god, with multiple examples listed in section 3.3. What was atypical was to show him as to some extent between those two stages, and to portray his reactions and suffering in response to the incompatibility of those two elements within himself. This was traditionally avoided, for as Silk (1985: 6) quoting the anthropologist Mary Douglas says:

...Danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is indefinable. The person who must pass from one to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others.

Dealing with Heracles as an interstitial figure was challenging, and was probably avoided for that reason. However, *The Trachiniae* does this, framing the divide between Heracles' divine and mortal sides as central to his characterisation. The effects of Heracles' dual (divine and human) natures in *The Trachiniae* are presented with exceptional clarity by Silk (1985:11):

It is impossible to gather what [Deianeira] could possibly see in Heracles: can the Heracles she pines for conceivably be the brutal, self-absorbed, yet also featureless phenomenon that we behold? The discrepancy, and equally the featurelessness of

³⁹ Examples of these contrasts can be seen in lines 1186-1195 and lines 1246-1254, which are expanded upon later.

Heracles itself, should serve to warn us that something more than character-study is involved in the contrast between the two figures. The difference between them - indeed between Heracles and most other tragic heroes - is that they belong to different cosmic orders. This is why, in the play, they must never meet: Heracles cannot meet his fellow men as such. Heracles and Deianeira communicate only through the death-robe; Heracles and Hyllos only through the threats and commands of one and the total acquiescence of the other. As a god, Heracles is self-sufficient, hence his distance from the human world of the other characters in the play. As a man, he has a need for relationship with others, which his divinity disrupts and distorts. Gods control men: men are their suffering victims. Accordingly, Heracles in this play is both god the controller (as he controls Iole and Hyllos) and man the suffering victim of a human mistake.

Fuqua (1980: 79) also points to the divide between the human and the divine, but in addition his description of the dramatic potential and function of showing the old and the new Heracles clearly underlines the points made above:

In its simplest form this tension stemmed from the Greeks' concern about the gulf that separated human and divine standards of conduct as well as levels of understanding. We see this tension directly demonstrated by Heracles in the *Trachiniae*; he is by any normal human standards guilty of lust and *atásthālos* [recklessness] and yet his attitude and his accomplishments are what ensure his heroic status. In the *Trachiniae* Sophocles neither censures nor lauds heroism, but with meticulous dramaturgy and in terms the audience would have readily understood constructs a portrait of heroism that is as brutal as it is magnificent. In so doing Sophocles gave vivid dramatic expression to a fundamental ambiguity of his culture.

As for the conflict between the Heracles of the present and the Heracles of the past, the structure of the play itself emphasises this as a concern. Heracles of course only appears in the *exodos* of the play, and until that point, we have only hearsay about him from his family and friends.⁴⁰ This effects a strong juxtaposition of what the audience expects Heracles to be (both through what they know of him beforehand, and what they have been told by the characters), and what they

⁴⁰ For example, the Chorus' praise for Heracles in lines 100-105 and Lichas' descriptions of Heracles' exploits and behaviour in lines 248-290.

eventually perceive in Heracles' actions on stage.⁴¹ The very first mention of Heracles is in line 23, where Deianeira states that "the amazing son of Zeus and Alkmene battled him [Achelous] and saved me." This introduces right from the outset one of the central issues surrounding Heracles, namely the heroic praise he receives for his deeds in the past, and his less-than-heroic actions in the present.

However, Heracles himself as a character in the play seems to be unaccepting of the now clear divide between his former greatness and his current decline. In the play he acknowledges that there is something wrong with him even if he cannot fully articulate the reasons and this is itself an atypical feature compared to other depictions of him where he is not so self-aware, such as when playwrights like Aristophanes used him as a character in their plays.⁴² When Heracles finally does appear on stage in person, in line 983, he seems quite different from what we have been told he is by Deianeira and the Chorus up until this point. This is a crippled, ruined man, one who rages and burns in agony as the poisoned robe slowly brings him closer to death. It is hardly the figure of the greatest man who ever lived.

It is worth acknowledging that, in many ways, the Heracles of *The Trachiniae* embodies a legacy of a man inherently filled with contrasts, as Fuqua (1980: 10) argues:

[N]ot only did the figure of Heracles develop in its own right but it also served as a locus about which there were numerous accretions in every period. He was, in short, one of the most flexible figures in Greek mythology, and the Greeks were never hesitant about employing his paradigm in a broad variety of ways.

What makes *The Trachiniae* atypical then is the way in which these contrasts that were created over many centuries for Heracles are purposefully blended here within the same character at the same time, and how the clash between them is made fundamental to his character in this play. Heracles' positive heroic qualities and his negative heroic qualities are equally noticeable and

⁴¹ This can be seen clearly in Hyllos' horror at his father's damaged condition and mad ravings in lines 1118-1119. This also serves to contrast Hyllos' initial anger when he returns to his mother in line 743 to report on what her gift has done to Heracles. At that point, Hyllos was filled with righteous indignation on behalf of his father, but by the time he witnesses Heracles' state for himself, he is filled with only pity and shock at what he sees and hears.

⁴² Both Aristophanes *Birds* and *Frogs* contain a less intelligent Heracles, used in that context for comedic purposes.

acknowledged within the play, illustrating that whatever Heracles does, whether good or bad, he does not do it by half-measures. His greatness is extreme, but so is his anger. He is extreme in all ways, and it is that which has given him great honour but also brings him to defeat and death at this final point. As Silk (1985: 1) says, to let this go unacknowledged is to do a disservice to Heracles' character. The tragedies that afflict Heracles are because of his internal conflicts. To have a situation where Heracles is portrayed as universally good but where it must still be acknowledged that these tragedies occurred, seems logically absurd, because the reason for them has been removed. Within the play, he does and says many terrible things, but Sophocles treats that fact as though it is natural for Heracles to do so, because the potential for such terrible things has always been within him, as Silk (1985: 1) interprets it. Heracles remains a man and a hero, and men and heroes are capable of acting in questionable ways, as Fuqua (1980: 79) explains:

The portrait of heroism Sophocles offers in *The Trachiniae* is not a comforting one. We are not presented with a positive paean of human endeavour but a brutal portrait of heroism in its most extreme and ironic form.

It is conceivable that Sophocles has created this atypical Heracles in order to provide new insight into heroism as a concept, but that is beyond the scope of this thesis. Section 4.2.2, despite its relatively brief and general approach, sheds light on questions that are explored throughout this thesis. It is necessary to see how Sophocles makes effective use of Heracles as a tragic hero, in a manner and to an extent which earlier plays did not. Furthermore, it is important to highlight and explore the specific ways in which Sophocles treats the character of Heracles. With a greater understanding of what elements of that character are atypical, there can be an enhanced appreciation of the value of this play in its distinctive and unusual approach to the person of Heracles. Moreover, the inner conflicts of Heracles are deeply important to the dramatic intention of the play as a whole, as it is they that drive all the tragic events and suffering that Heracles experiences. This is explored in more depth in the following section.

4.2.3. *The Suffering Heracles*

In section 4.2.3, *The Trachiniae* is examined with the purpose of determining the specific way in which it portrays Heracles as a tragic or “suffering Heracles.” This is to demonstrate that, despite its atypical portrayal of Heracles discussed above, *The Trachiniae* still functions as a good

example of tragedy's typical treatment of its heroic protagonist. Many of the issues that distinguish *The Trachiniae* stem from the fact that the hero in question is Heracles, with all the complications that arise naturally from his involvement. One of the strengths of this play is that it successfully associates many tragic events with Heracles without side-stepping the challenges of his complexity as a character. The most prominent tragic elements are discussed below, with a brief examination of the appropriateness of their use in respect of the character of Heracles.

There are three major tragic elements in *The Trachiniae*. Firstly, there is the emotional gulf between Heracles and his family. Secondly, there is the way in which the older and newer features of Heracles' personality, when portrayed within the same character in this one play, create conflict and tragedy for him and all those around them. Finally, there is the issue of Heracles' apotheosis (or possibly lack thereof) at the end of the play.

To my mind, the most significant source of tragedy in the play is the emotional divide between Heracles and his family. This is most immediately apparent in the interaction between Hyllos and Heracles, but the tragedy is further deepened through the way in which this estrangement is echoed and repeated between Heracles and Zeus. Zeus does not in fact even appear on stage, making the lack of contact even more poignant. While many plays do not include a personal appearance of the gods, it is notably unusual that they have no direct influence in any form in *The Trachiniae*, despite the personal relationship Heracles is supposed to have with Zeus in particular and the number of times he invokes Zeus here. These tragic elements derive primarily from the way in which Hyllos is unable to understand his demi-god father, and how Heracles is similarly unable to understand his fully divine father. They are inevitably separated by their inherent natures. An additional tragic feature is the fact that neither of the characters on stage fully recognises this as a problem, and Heracles in particular experiences a great deal of pain as a result of his dual nature. To restate an earlier excerpt from Silk (1985: 11):

As a god, Heracles is self-sufficient, hence his distance from the human world of the other characters in the play. As a man, he has a need for relationship with others, which his divinity disrupts and distorts. Gods control men: men are their suffering victims. Accordingly, Heracles in this play is both god the controller (as he controls Iole and Hyllos) and man the suffering victim of a human mistake.

In respect of Heracles' relationship with his children, there is a very telling observation from Deianeira early on in the play. She says in lines 37-40:

Of course we had children. He sees them, sometimes,
the way a farmer tends a back field, twice
a year – sowing his seed, reaping the harvest (Bagg and Scully 2011: 109).

Much of the play is shown from Hyllos' perspective as he engages with Heracles, so what Heracles does and says seems especially harsh or uncaring. However, this is perhaps a simplistic view. In these scenes it becomes apparent that the qualities Heracles values are very different from those that are important to Hyllos, and it is Hyllos' inability to understand his father that makes Heracles' demands seem so horrific. The very first thing Heracles says directly to Hyllos in the play is that Hyllos should commit the blood crime of killing his own father, and that Hyllos is honour-bound to do so (*Trach.* 1157-1160). Heracles then resumes his preoccupation with his own pain, which is perhaps understandable, but when he speaks to Hyllos again, this is all he musters, in lines 1196-1204:

Son, prove you are my son in fact.
Show me you're my son, and not hers.
Bring her out here, the woman who bore you.
Take her in your hands and put her in mine.
When she suffers what she deserves,
I'll know what causes you more pain –
my own broken body, or hers.
Go do it, Son. Don't cringe. Do it
Show me some pity (Bagg and Scully 2011: 166).

Hyllos takes from this that his father is ordering him to orphan himself. However, Heracles does not know that Deianeira acted out of poor judgement rather than malevolence. The above lines therefore seem to show a Heracles desperate to have his son confirm his loyalty to him. The manner of proving his loyalty that Heracles asks of Hyllos seems intolerably cruel to Hyllos, but to Heracles, the virtue of showing filial piety, especially to one's father, would be of paramount

importance. Heracles is essentially demanding that Hyllos act as he himself would; the tragedy derives from Heracles' lack of understanding that it is necessary to explain to Hyllos why this is so important. There is irony in this, when it is kept in mind that later in the play Heracles in turn does not understand the actions of Zeus. As Conacher (1997: 32) indicates, an audience watching the play would find the back-and-forth argument between Hyllos and Heracles especially tragic, as they would be able to feel sympathy for both of the characters involved.

The final scene of the play shows Hyllos, by agreeing to carry out Heracles' wishes, finding himself forced to kill his father after witnessing the death of his mother earlier that day. In his final lines (lines 1437-1440), Hyllos despairs of the passivity and apparent uncaring nature of the gods, by extension implicating his father in this too. However, in many ways, as Mikalson (1974: 91) argues, Heracles in the play is just as much abandoned by Zeus as Hyllos is by Heracles. Zeus does not appear, despite the suffering of his favoured son and despite the anguished pleas that son makes to him during his trials. Heracles is actually engaged in making a grand sacrifice to Zeus at his altar when he puts on the poisoned robe that leads to his death, and yet still there is no response from his father. Early on in the play, when Deianeira is worrying about Heracles returning home safely, the Chorus ironically says, in lines 170-171:

When has Zeus ever been
indifferent to one of his sons? (Bagg and Scully 2011: 115)

It is implied later that Zeus is indeed not indifferent, he is not ignoring Heracles; but he is causing the suffering to continue for reasons only he understands or reasons that matter only to him. Both Heracles and Hyllos point to this. In lines 1121-1123, for example, Heracles says:

Where is the spellbinder, the shrewd doctor,
who can cure this disease? Only Zeus.
Will the healer visit my bed?
I'd be amazed if he did (Bagg and Scully 2011: 162).

And soon after this, Hyllos says in lines 1146-1150:

...But I don't know how –
does anyone know how? –

to deaden his flesh to this torture.

This is what Zeus wants him to feel (Bagg and Scully 2011: 163).

Mikalson (1974: 91-92) is of the opinion that Zeus forces hardship on Heracles so that his eventual legacy will be all the greater. Mikalson argues that throughout Heracles' life Zeus has intermittently abandoned him on purpose, and that in doing so he provided Heracles with the opportunity for his most memorable deeds. There would have been no Labours, Mikalson says, if Zeus had not been cruel to Heracles through his inaction. And of course, there is added irony in the fact that while Heracles seems so certain that Hyllos must do as he commands because as his father Heracles knows what is best for him, Heracles himself questions the lack of involvement of Zeus, who might be assumed also to know what is best for his son. Mikalson (1974: 93) goes on to explain that his theory is not an entirely satisfactory explanation as far as the play is concerned, because Hyllos rages against the cruelty and uncaring nature of the gods and is given no answer and no consolation, and his grievances are never fully addressed. The attack Hyllos makes on Zeus ends abruptly, and the audience is left to ponder the meaning of it. Mikalson (1974: 93) argues that more important than the question of who is right or wrong, is the emphasis on the permanent division between fathers and sons, manifest in the relationships between Zeus, Heracles and Hyllos because of their natures. Furthermore, Mikalson (1974: 93) points out, it is important to remember that Heracles is doubly tragically affected because he is caught in the middle as an interstitial figure. He does not see the ineffable plans of the gods, but neither does he understand the ordinary human emotional concerns raised by Hyllos.

Scholars such as Fuqua (1980: 77), Holt (1989: 79) and Conacher (1997: 33) argue that Heracles' actions later in this play show him becoming more divine and forceful in nature, behaving increasingly in the manner expected of a god. Also, in the greater mythological context, Heracles' demands make sense in terms of his upcoming apotheosis. The point where he seems the closest to abandoning all common human understanding comes almost at the end of the play. This begins from line 1312, when Heracles understands that the prophecies foretelling his death have been fulfilled. He regains a sense of direction that he did not display earlier in the play; he no longer rages against his pain and cries out for death, he now has strict orders for

Hyllos that must be fulfilled as quickly as possible.⁴³ Although these orders are harsh and in many ways cruel, they reflect the confident, commanding hero Heracles has always been, although perhaps now placed into rather more grim circumstances. They also foreshadow the god that he is to become. Heracles now seems to understand that what he is asking of Hyllos is neither fair nor kind,⁴⁴ but he demands his service anyway and is not to be swayed at any point. If the audience were not watching a weak Heracles being carried on a stretcher, they could almost imagine that they were seeing the strong, commanding hero of old once again. Also, the audience is reminded that there is not only a gulf between gods and humans; there is one between ordinary mortals and heroes as well. This idea was touched on in section 2.1 and 2.2 and it is also emphasised by Fuqua (1980: 78):

The steadfastness [Heracles] demonstrates and the demands he makes upon his son in the *exodos* do not mark a lessening of resolve or intensity of purpose, but rather signal his acceptance of his heroism and the gulf between heroic and human sensibilities.

However, as a single instance of family interaction, the events on stage do reflect callous cruelty and lack of consideration from a father to a son. Heracles has reasons for acting in such a way, and the audience can even recognise those reasons. But when Hyllos fails to see the underlying purpose, and Heracles is unable to understand his son's distress, both these characters are made more tragic and more pitiable. Furthermore, what this demonstrates to the audience is that, while Heracles's deeds may indeed make him a fine hero and the "best of men" (line 930), he is as susceptible to human failings as any other man; success as a hero does not automatically mean success as a father, or indeed, as a husband. Fuqua (1980: 79) argues that Sophocles shows in this play a Heracles who is every bit as proud, strong and arrogant as he has always had the capacity to be; this is consistent with how previous literature featuring Heracles had portrayed him.

⁴³ These orders, with interjections from Hyllos, are to be found in lines 1193-1228. The first order is that Hyllos should carry Heracles up to the top of the sacred Mount Oeta and ritually immolate him. The second order is that Hyllos is to marry Iole after his father's death.

⁴⁴ In the section beginning from lines 1256, Heracles convinces Hyllos by arguing that Hyllos perform these acts out of the duty a son owes towards a father, rather than for any actual enjoyment Hyllos might feel at easing his father's pain.

The second major tragic element in this play arises from the simultaneous portrayal of both older and newer conceptions of Heracles. Above, we examined how poorly Heracles functions when he is placed within an ordinary, domestic life; but what is worth taking note of is that, although he continues to behave in accordance with the nature ascribed to him in other literary works, the context in which he is placed has changed, with tragic consequences. So there is discord between Heracles' nature and ideals on the one hand and the setting of the play, which is altogether more domestic and "ordinary" than Heracles himself, on the other. This means that the setting is unsuited to the elements of the older Heracles that he continues to carry with him, and a clash occurs. In the words of Conacher (1997: 21) there is an inherent divide in the play between two spaces. The domestic realm, which contains the home of Heracles, his family and the villagers, is what primarily features on stage in the play. The second space is the "wild country," which exists far away from the setting of the play. This "wild country," as Conacher (1997: 21) describes it, is a place which Deianeira hopes will never encroach upon the domestic sphere in which she and her family live. However, as Conacher (1997: 21) argues, it is also the only place in which Heracles feels his heroic purposes are fulfilled. Conacher (1997: 21) argues this to be the reason why Heracles is perpetually away from home at the start of the play, as Deianeira states in lines 24-27. There is little room in the domestic realm for constant battles against foes and monsters and for that reason, Heracles constantly seeks out and returns to the wild country, even when it is to his detriment.

The majority of Heracles' life has been spent in a world where he interacted daily with gods and other heroes and where he engaged in battle with foul and horrific monsters that were far beyond normal human comprehension. By going forth and defeating these wild forces and thereby civilising the world, Heracles has received praise and adoration. His reputation and legacy have been built on doing exactly that. But within *The Trachiniae*, that world seems, as Fuqua (1980: 41) puts it, "distant and disassociated from what is happening at [this] point." This thesis reasons that, faced with a world that has now been effectively civilised by his actions, Heracles seems desperate to seek out further conflicts and new challenges, on the flimsiest of pretexts. He is unable to retire to the peaceful world he has created. In such a context, his heroic qualities become more terrifying than inspiring.

In *The Trachiniae*, the vibrant and fantastical world in which Heracles existed in the other literature featuring him has been relegated to a distant, unknowable place.⁴⁵ Here and now, Heracles seems very much on the verge of existing in the same ordinary world inhabited by the rest of humanity. It is possible to understand this theme as showing that the time of Heracles is itself passing, and thus the man must pass with it too. Heracles was a figure exemplified by his slaying of beasts and by his battles against the primordial monsters threatening humanity. In a world where he has conquered all those, what is there left for him personally and what is his role now? Gods have a perpetual realm, a domain, a purpose which they control and manage and rule over. A man does not. A man lives a life of his own making, accomplishing what he can for himself for a limited time. Conacher (1997: 21) and Hinden (1973: 176) both argue the above points, and furthermore reason that Heracles, existing somewhere between the two extremes of a man and a god, has within the context of *The Trachiniae* begun to lose his “domain” and with it his purpose. Until Heracles resolves his inner conflict and becomes either fully a man or fully a god, he will never comfortably fit into any space in the world. Heracles was always a great civiliser, but he now seems to have become a victim of his own far-reaching success as the enduring element of wildness in him no longer has a place in the new, “civilised world”⁴⁶ he has achieved. So Heracles searches far and wide for new challenges to address and battles to wage, at great and tragic cost. As Hinden (1973: 176) argues too, in failing to master his urges, Heracles not only affects his own life negatively, he also brings destruction back to the community in which he lives. This echoes the point made earlier in section 2.3, namely that as an inevitable consequence of their own natures heroes carry the potential for tragedy within them at all times. In Heracles, this is even more evident because of his dual nature as a demi-god.

The above arguments are a continuation of similar conclusions drawn earlier from the examination of family relationships as a source of tragedy: it is not Heracles who has changed, but the circumstances in which he finds himself. Where the first tragic element derived from the

⁴⁵ I argue this as being demonstrated in the fact that the supernatural is not portrayed on stage in the play: mythical creatures such as centaurs and the hydra, and epic battles against powerful foes are described vividly, but never witnessed in the play itself. What we see in the play as the audience is noticeably devoid of visible supernatural elements. Furthermore, whenever Heracles speaks of his involvement in fantastical adventures, his tone is arguably nostalgic, rather than referential towards the present or future. This is of course heightened by the fact that Heracles believes his death is imminent.

⁴⁶ The play implies, through much of Deianeira’s speech, (as seen in lines 35-50 for instance), that, if left alone, Heracles would pursue his more mortal interests from this point on, and so, perhaps his death and undoing can even be said to be necessary at this point.

emotional distance between Heracles and the other characters, this tragic element shows the figurative distance in terms of space between Heracles and the world that he is made to inhabit in the play; a world in which he can no longer live comfortably. As Fuqua (1980: 77) reasons, Heracles has everything a normal man might want at home, and yet this is not enough because, at the end of the day, Heracles is not a normal man, and he is not even a normal hero. Fuqua (1980: 78) argues that within *The Trachiniae* Heracles is defined almost completely by his divided nature.

I believe that Heracles' inability to adapt his nature to a changed world is highlighted in *The Trachiniae* in several ways. This is primarily evident in his disbelief when faced with the news that it is Deianeira who has undone him, a fact which challenges his opinion of himself, his idea of how the world functions, and his strong faith in his own might. He says in lines 1186-1195:

No fighting soldier,
no army of giants
sprung from the earth,
no shock of wild beasts,
hurt me like this – not my own Greece,
nor barbarous shores, no land
I came to save. No, a frail woman,
born with no male's strength,
she beat me – only she.

And didn't even need a sword (Bagg and Scully 2011: 165).

This one passage shows that everything Heracles has stood for and personally believed in has now been undone. He expected his own death, as shown by a prophecy mentioned earlier in the play, but even that is coming in none of the ways he expected. He has been overcome in a manner he had discounted entirely: by a woman. With this realisation, he feels his own masculinity is challenged. He says to Hyllos in lines 1206 and 1210:

...Look at me
weeping and bawling like a girl.

...Now this hard man finds out he's a woman (Bagg and Scully 2011: 166).

As seen here, Heracles' opinion of himself is strongly tied to his idea of his masculinity and physical strength, and he desperately tries to cling to this as a symbol of his power even as that power is slipping away from him. To Heracles, his power makes him who he is. Lines 1246-1254 emphasise this tragic loss for him:

These struggles – and a thousand more –
have tested me. No man can boast
he has beaten my strength.
But now, with my bones
unhinged and my flesh shredded,
I lose to an invisible raider –
I, son of a mother so noble,
I, whose father they call Zeus,
god of the star-filled sky (Bagg and Scully 2011: 167).

Much of the tragedy in these sections comes from seeing Heracles so completely diminished. He is reduced in stature and strength; he has lost everything he most values. However, what makes it even more tragic is his inability to realise that it is his own compulsive drive to seek out more challenges that has led him to this point. Furthermore, he doesn't grasp that he has always had much of value waiting for him at home, including a loving family and a peaceful domestic life. It is not necessary to continue exerting his strength in the same way he always has. However, it can be argued, as Pike (1977: 73) does, that to stop exerting his might would be to stop being Heracles. From this perspective, another tragic element of the play is the way in which it shows that only through losing everything that made him who he was, could Heracles have escaped being completely undone.

Heracles seems to recognise this to some extent, and makes many references to his previous glories and once-powerful stature. One such set of lines, 1133-1136, states: ⁴⁷

⁴⁷ See also lines 1232-1245, where the former heroic actions of Heracles are listed by him to emphasize how they, despite being grand works and deeds, have all counted for naught at this point in his life, and they could not save him from the pain he currently experiences.

I wore myself out clearing
Greece of marauders –
sea monsters, forest brutes (Bagg and Scully 2011: 163).

In reminiscing about his previous heroics, Heracles is reminding both the audience and himself that he was once greater than he is now in his death throes; that he was once the great civilising force of Greece, destroying barbarians and making cities safe. There is a sense that, after all his good deeds, Heracles now feels it is unfair that he should be suffering so intensely. This is another way in which the Heracles of the past, who nobly did great deeds to serve the world and the gods, contrasts with the Heracles of the present, who perhaps feels that a debt is owed to him for his service.

The section beginning at line 1221 shows clearly how Heracles is frantically trying to hold on to what he was, even though he knows that this is impossible. He despairs of the failings of his body, which has served him so faithfully for so many years:

My hands, O you hands,
my shoulders, chest, arms, -
how frail you are!
Once you did all that I asked

You were lethal weapons (Bagg and Scully 2011: 167).

Heracles is lost in a moment of great anguish at having that which mattered most to him – his strength – taken from him. For, as anyone might ask, what is Heracles without his strength? And the man himself seems to realise this great tragedy at this point, and one can easily respond with sympathy for many reasons here.

In lines 1232-1245, Heracles proceeds to list all of his Labours again, many of which involved the taming or slaying of beasts, and it is therefore interesting that immediately before he does so, he is wracked by another spasm of pain and refers to the experience using the following terminology in line 1220: “the beast is at me again, it’s famished and it’s raging.” I believe that the only way Heracles can comprehend or come to terms with the great pain he is experiencing, is to turn it in his mind into another monster. Perhaps he holds the faint hope that if he

understands it, he can defeat it. The fact that he cannot do so is well designed to elicit sympathy from the audience. Heracles knows how to battle monsters, he knows how to use his strength; he now appears to have nothing left. This section is perhaps the most personally tragic for Heracles in the entire play.

The way in which this section recollects Heracles' former greatness and contrasts it bitterly with his present state is echoed by the Chorus Leader immediately afterwards, who says that there will be only mourning in Greece when he dies. Despite everything else, such sections remind the audience that Heracles is still in many ways deserving of the high praise and accolades he has always received. The audience, watching this great man suffer, is reminded that the Heracles of the past and the Heracles of the present, despite their differences and conflicts, exist within the same person in this play. This in turn heightens the tragedy inflicted on Heracles.

The final tragic element I wish to highlight that impacts upon Heracles in a major way in this play is the ending, the issue of his apotheosis. The most important point to understand about the ending of *The Trachiniae* relates to the conspicuous omission of a concept, as opposed to an actually present topic. The reason this is relevant for this section is that there are two options to consider, as Holt (1989: 69) argues. Firstly, it is possible that Sophocles purposefully omitted the apotheosis, intending that it not be considered part of the narrative of the play. Alternately, it may be that for thematic purposes the apotheosis does not feature in the play, but can be considered to occur immediately after the events of the play end. There is no way to say for certain which view is more valid, and what this thesis wishes to show is that each option affects the portrayal of Heracles as a tragic figure in a different way.

As mentioned above, the play itself does not include any direct mention of the apotheosis that takes place after Heracles' death. The events of the play come to an end with Hyllos taking his comatose father to be placed on a funeral pyre where he will be given the release of death. As Stafford (2013: 80) points out, this is strikingly at odds with most of the other literary and material interpretations of the myth of Heracles' death. Stafford (2013: 80) argues that the majority of the other adaptations of this myth seem designed specifically to emphasise how Heracles achieves godhood, whereas *The Trachiniae* places the focus on the family drama before the apotheosis. Therefore, the decision Sophocles makes to leave it out surely serves some

purpose, or even many purposes, within a play that already seems to challenge previous conceptions of Heracles at every turn.

Holt (1989: 69) has done extensive research into this subject, and evaluates arguments dating from the time of antiquity into the period of modern scholarship. He divides the arguments about Sophocles' omission of Heracles' apotheosis broadly into two major groups. The first is what he calls the "argument from silence," which is focused on the issue mentioned earlier, that Heracles' apotheosis was well known culturally at this time and yet is simply, indisputably, not included in the play. Proponents of this view point out that the widespread awareness of the apotheosis means that it could be assumed by the audience. The second is what Holt calls the "moral argument," which claims that Heracles, as he is shown in *The Trachiniae*, is simply too crude, too selfish, too inhumane to have earned the right of divine, supernatural status.

Regarding the first argument, that the apotheosis is to be assumed to take place at the end of the play, Holt (1989: 70) reminds us that it was the privilege of a playwright to adapt and focus a myth as he saw fit. Certain features of a myth may be given less importance in the play or may be altered to make certain characters more sympathetic;⁴⁸ and authors may even go so far as to specifically exclude certain background aspects of the myth. Sophocles could very well have simply wished to use this myth to highlight different conflicts in Heracles' life. This does not mean that he intended to imply that the apotheosis did not occur; merely that he regarded it as less important for the message of this play. Another point made by Holt (1989: 72) is that there is strong evidence to suggest that Heracles' apotheosis was largely accepted in fifth century BCE Athenian society. It is unlikely that Sophocles would have invented within his narrative a story of Heracles simply dying and not ascending, as that would have wholly contradicted the common belief regarding Heracles at this stage. Finally, Holt (1989: 74) also looks at the various visual depictions of Heracles' funeral pyre and apotheosis, and finds that as a general trend, although representations of Heracles' apotheosis did not necessarily feature the pyre, whenever the pyre is included with Heracles, it is only to depict his apotheosis. Therefore, Holt reasons, the fact that the pyre is mentioned in *The Trachiniae* can be read as a reference to the apotheosis.

⁴⁸ Pike (1977: 77) specifically points out that Deianeira as she is characterised in *The Trachiniae* is very distinct from other earlier versions of her.

However, several elements in the play may suggest that Heracles is to die a normal death. Most of these are comments made by Heracles himself, who believes he will die and go “below the earth,” as in lines 1143-1146, lines 1172, and 1203. However, Holt (1989: 75) points out that more important than what Heracles makes of his death, is what the audience makes of it. Dramatic irony was a forceful presence in Greek tragedy. What is notable in this context is the events following line 1296, immediately after Heracles realises that the manner of his death will fulfil the old prophecies spoken over him. Heracles now issues orders for his cremation to take place on the mountain. Up until this point, the play on the whole has been split evenly between Deianeira and Heracles as protagonists, focusing only on Heracles’ family drama. Holt (1989: 76) mentions the claims of some scholars that the inclusion of the pyre is simply a cumbersome attachment to the play, to make it conform more closely to the traditional version of the myth. However, its inclusion undeniably brings to the fore Heracles’ exaltation more than anything else in the play does. As Holt (1989: 76) puts it:

We would expect Sophocles to omit it [the pyre scene] if he meant to keep the exaltation out of the audience’s minds. Instead, he takes the hero right to the threshold of exaltation. We do not go beyond the threshold; the play emphasizes Heracles’ sufferings and strength of will, not his eventual repose, and so it ends with its 'tragic' tone intact.

From this point, line 1296 and on, the character of Heracles transforms. Whereas before he was writhing in helpless anguish, screaming and crying out to the world, now he is purposeful, finally understanding what the oracles told him. He is still fierce and cruel in his demands, but he is resolute again. He is determined to take control of the situation and exert as much of his will over it as he can. Holt (1989: 76) argues that this scene from line 1296 onwards is about Heracles applying his heroic will for the very last time. What happens next is almost immaterial: the significance is in the fact that Heracles’ final actions are of his own making; they are within his own power. In this way, he is once again displaying his typical heroism, the characteristic that makes him truly Heracles. I argue that this is possibly one of the few positive tones set by the play as a whole. Heracles has had tragedy after tragedy thrust upon him, but he achieves some strength of will, an echo of his intrinsic glory, in his final moments. Whether this increases the tragedy or to some extent alleviates it, is open to debate. There are powerful concepts with which

an audience can identify both in viewing Heracles as clutching for some tiny remnant of his former self, thus emphasising the sad state he has reached now, and in interpreting the scene as showing that some of his strength is still present and that he will fight to the end.

Holt (1989: 77) calls the second major trend in interpretations of the ending of *The Trachiniae*, the moral argument. This argument proceeds as follows: if Sophocles intended for Heracles to receive exaltation after his death, why did he make his portrayal here so shocking and unpleasant? His actions in the house of Eurytos, his treatment of Iole and Deianeira, his killing of Iphitos and Lichas, and his treatment of Hyllos are all major points that compound the negative impression of this Heracles. However, as Holt (1989: 77) emphasises as well, it is very easy to slip into moral anachronism when analysing this play and that should be actively avoided. Fuqua (1980: 77) and Silk (1985: 12) share this opinion in expounding their interpretations of Heracles' nature in this play. They argue that what heroes and heroism meant to the Ancient Greeks is not what has come to be understood by the concepts in the modern world, and should not ever be taken as such. Kindness and virtue are not necessarily constantly present in Greek heroes, and Heracles can remain fully heroic without displaying those characteristics all the time.

This is not to say that Heracles' actions in the play are completely excusable. He does questionable things to those closest to him, as well as to those who have never harmed him and do not deserve any of what befalls them at his hands. One should not search for mitigating circumstances for Heracles or attempt to explain them away; rather, what should be understood is that these actions are as much part of Heracles as his good aspects are, and contribute equally to the composite picture of his nature. As Fuqua (1980: 78) points out, Sophocles does not merely tacitly acknowledge Heracles' more negative qualities; he actively thrusts them into view. This concept will be highlighted again in section 4.2.3. The moral argument is far more nuanced than a simple decision on whether Heracles "deserves" his apotheosis or not. Silk (1985: 18) argues that if *The Trachiniae* is viewed as addressing the inherent conflict present in Heracles because of his demi-god nature, the way to resolve this conflict would be to have Heracles finally abandon one of those aspects, his human side or his divine self, and thus eliminate this contradiction and source of tragedy within himself. And yet, precisely because this resolution does not happen on stage, the tragic tone of the play is maintained. I argue that the

tragedy of the play is in fact intensified because this event is excluded from the audience's view, with the play ending as it does with Hyllus broken and bitter, his grievances unanswered.

All of the points discussed above that show Heracles in *The Trachiniae* as tragic or suffering, from his family difficulties and his own inherent unsettled nature to the impact of his apotheosis, derive from the same original source: the divided, conflicted nature of Heracles, split between his divine and human self. This may very well be the reason for the generally-experienced difficulties in representing Heracles as a tragic hero on stage, and may explain why *The Trachiniae* was so important and unusual in doing so. Silk (1985: 1) points out that these aspects of Heracles' character were not Sophocles' own invention, but that other authors and playwrights had avoided addressing them when portraying the nature of Heracles. Silk (1985: 12) argues that it is the very realism of Sophocles' Heracles that gives him his strength as a character, especially if the audience keeps in mind that immediately after the events in the play, Heracles' assumption of godhood places him well outside the bounds of realistic, culpable behaviour in future:

In his brutality the Sophoclean Heracles embodies a mode of life which, by any human standard, must seem repellent; yet the devotion he inspires in his son and wife, who are the chief victims of his repellent behaviour, seems to place him in some kind of ideal, supra-human plane beyond judgement. The contradiction is fundamental. Situated on the margins between the human and the divine, on the verge of an apotheosis that never comes, Heracles represents both those deep, immortal longings which all men feel or repress, and which the Greeks felt to be too dangerous to admit, and the huge but human sufferings and dislocations that are felt to go with them. Having chosen to dramatize this disturbing anomaly, Sophocles confronts us with its implications right up to the end (Silk 1985: 12).

And so, ultimately, perhaps it is suitable that Heracles should have this last moment where his humanity is emphasised in all its tragic implications, because it is that which he is giving up. It is this human element too which makes him an interesting and relatable character for modern audiences. It is also possible to see why addressing this subject matter would have been a daunting task for most authors, especially in respect of a figure as popular as Heracles. It is inherently challenging on many levels to open up the debate about what happens when the divine-heroic-mortal lines are mingled within one figure.

The great success of this play as a whole is that Sophocles achieves that which other playwrights did not dare to attempt, as Fuqua (1989: 79) argues: Sophocles shows the audience Heracles as he had been portrayed in myth over centuries, but then goes on to portray how aspects of Heracles' character may be understood as inherently tragic and the cause of great suffering in Heracles himself. This Heracles is not a completely new invention by Sophocles; he is the same Heracles that all the Greeks knew in their literature before this point. Fuqua's (1989: 79) argument is that if Sophocles wished to portray Heracles as purely a villain, he would not have emphasised that Heracles is the "greatest of men." When Heracles mentions his great deeds of the past, or speaks of his Labours and his civilising of the world, the audience is reminded of the greatness of what he had accomplished and feels sympathy for him. To say that Heracles is just a crude, callous presence at the end of the play is to miss the point of the play. Sophocles spends too much time laying out both heroic virtues and heroic vices for us to ignore one or the other. Holt (1989: 77) emphasises that both are present within Heracles and both have led him to this point:

The play acknowledges Heracles' greatness, but it focuses our attention on the harsh aspects of his nature, not on his rewards. By admitting Heracles' exaltation but not showing it, Sophocles affirms Heracles' heroism but reminds us of the great suffering which it involves, both for the hero himself and for those around him. He presents a sober vision of life with much grandeur but little comfort.

The Trachiniae illuminates the difficulties of trying to present a complex character such as Heracles within one specific context of a play while remaining true to the centuries of characterisation he had received outside of this one play. The great strength of Sophocles' work here is his willingness to embrace all these characteristics rather than focusing on the simplistic ones alone, thereby showing us fully the tragedy that might emerge from such conflicting characteristics. The actions of Heracles in this play and the events that befall him were always possible within the way he was characterised, but Sophocles is the first to show Heracles in such a weakened, suffering state. The great success of the play is that it is so visceral and emotional on every level that it continues to inspire deep debate even today. Heracles' tragedy was that he could never stop being Heracles, and the play makes clear that to be Heracles was to have the

potential for suffering and tragedy near the surface continuously, because of the inner conflict between his divided aspects of man and god. In this way, while *The Trachiniae* is unusual in its portrayal of Heracles, it may be regarded as a very convincing depiction of a multi-faceted character. *The Trachiniae* succeeds in simultaneously demonstrating a Heracles atypical by comparison with prior depictions of him, and a character that, nevertheless, also incorporates most of the features traditionally ascribed to him.

4.3. Euripides' *Heracles*

4.3.1. Overview

Following the close examination of the relevant sections of *The Trachiniae*, section 4.3 presents a similar scrutiny of Euripides' *Heracles*. This initial section will serve the purpose of providing basic background information in order to contextualise some elements of the play before it is examined in depth. As in the case of *The Trachiniae*, a short plot summary of the play will also be provided.⁴⁹

Euripides' *Heracles*, alternately titled *Hercules Furens*,⁵⁰ was written, so far as can be determined, sometime between 425 BCE and 416 BCE and performed first at the City Dionysia (Stafford 2013: 82). This places it in very rough terms about ten years after *The Trachiniae*, as section 4.2.1 indicates, although of course these dates are by no means certain. The major events of the play are outlined here.

As the play opens, Heracles' mortal step-father Amphytrion, Heracles' wife Megara, and Heracles' three children are all prisoners at the temple of Zeus in the city of Thebes (lines 1-60). Until this point, they have been enjoying peaceful happy lives in the city, but Thebes has now been conquered by a cruel tyrant named Lycus (lines 32-40). Heracles himself is completing the last of his Twelve Labours, the retrieval of Cerberus from the Underworld, and he is assumed dead or feared dead by most of the characters (lines 19-28). Lycus visits the prisoners to mock Heracles and criticise him, before informing the family that they are to be executed; he then leaves. The family will be burned on the altar of Zeus like a suppliant sacrifice⁵¹ (lines 140-250). Amphytrion and Megara both spend some time despairing: Amphytrion rails against the gods, and Megara bemoans that her children will never have the lives that she and Heracles wanted for them (lines 240-348). Just as their despair seems to peak, Heracles returns (line 523). He is unaware of the current developments but when informed, seeks immediate vengeance (lines 531-570). Heracles tells the family that he is so late in returning because while in the Underworld, he rescued an imprisoned Theseus and took him back to Athens (line 619). Heracles, Megara and their children go off stage, to enter the palace. Lycus arrives, finds only Amphytrion, and is told

⁴⁹ The translation of the *Heracles* used throughout is Vellacott (1963).

⁵⁰ The former title will be preferred in this thesis, in order to avoid confusion with the later Roman-era play *Hercules Furens* by Seneca.

⁵¹ Papadopoulou (2005: 10) shows evidence to support this comparison.

that the others are waiting for him inside the palace (lines 701-729). Lycus follows them, and is slain by Heracles off-stage (line 756). There is a brief period of rejoicing, with Amphytrion also entering the palace (lines 735-815).

However, this happiness is short-lived. While Heracles and his family are still off-stage, there is the sudden appearance of the embodiment of Madness along with Hera's servant Iris (line 816). Iris announces that as Heracles has completed his Labours, he is no longer under the protection of Zeus and that Hera can now both punish him and take her own personal revenge on him (lines 823-841). Madness descends to infect Heracles (line 866). A messenger arrives to tell the Chorus what has occurred: Madness has caused Heracles to believe that he was attacking Eurystheus, the king who humiliated him throughout his Twelve Labours, but instead Heracles has killed his wife and all of his children, thinking they were those of Eurystheus. Before he could kill Amphytrion too, Athena descended and stopped him, knocking Heracles unconscious (lines 923-1018). Heracles, bound, is presented back on stage. Amphytrion wakes him up and explains what has happened. Heracles is appalled, and wishes immediately to kill himself as he cannot bear his crime (lines 1089-1163). At this point, Theseus arrives with his army; after hearing of the trouble in Thebes he had immediately set out to aid Heracles (line 1165). Theseus and Heracles spend a long time in debate, with Heracles deeply despairing and Theseus coaxing him out of his suicidal state (lines 1212-1400). Theseus tells Heracles that because the crime of familial murder means that Heracles cannot remain in Thebes, Heracles can journey with him to Athens and remain their forever as their honoured guest (lines 1322-1339). Eventually, Theseus convinces him of the value of their true friendship (lines 1402 – 1417). Heracles asks Amphytrion to bury his dead family, and Theseus and Heracles depart, with Heracles leaning on Theseus (lines 1418-1428).

The story of Heracles' madness with the account of him slaying his own family was not new. Stafford (2013: 83) describes a sixth century BCE epic titled the *Kypria* in which Nestor recounts the events in an aside, and points out that the authors Pausanias and Pherekydes also mention it. It is important to try to establish when in the course of Heracles' adventures this was said to have occurred. According to Stafford (2013: 83), authors such as Diodoros and Apollodorus seem to place it before his famous Labours. This makes Euripides' placement of it immediately after the completion of the Labours, when Heracles is at the height of his success, all the more tragic. Stafford (2013: 83) argues that this placement in the time-line of the myth is

Euripides' own invention and would have meant that right from the outset, the audience would have been unsure of what was to occur in the play; the very premise from the first lines defied expectation. As has been mentioned in section 3.1, and as Pozzi & Wickersham (1991: 3-5) argue, this was unusual in the world of Greek tragedy, where generally all plots were known in some detail before they were performed and were typically adjusted in minor ways only.

Stafford (2013: 84) discusses the scholarly argument that the play should be considered to have two parts, with the turning point between the two being the joyful moment of celebration following the death of Lycus that is cut short by the arrival of Iris and Madness. Other scholars, such as Burnett (1971: 157), consider the play to consist of three distinct plot movements: the family awaiting the return of Heracles and liberation from Lycus, the descent of Madness and the slaying of Heracles' family at his own hands, and finally the chance of salvation offered by the return of Theseus. This is an example of what Burnett (1971: 157) calls "triple-action", which functions as an extension of Burnett's greater theory regarding Euripides' style of writing. Burnett defines this style as applying the concept of "mixed-reversal": where different sequences of events with widely varying tones are incorporated within the same play to follow after each other, making the eventual drama and tragedy as they combine more dynamic and effective. In simple terms, the hero is first raised up to ever-greater heights of success before being flung down through tragedy moments afterwards (Burnett 1971: 157).

Burnett (1971: 3) also describes at length the criticism levelled by many scholars at the structuring of the play, but all that is important for this thesis is that the structure is yet another way of highlighting the tragedy that befalls Heracles. The focus on the play in this thesis remains on its primary figure, Heracles, and his interactions with the other characters. Ultimately, all relate back to Heracles and behave as they do because of Heracles: he is unquestionably the prime mover in this play. The contentious elements of mixed-reversal do not weaken or cripple the play; rather they serve a direct purpose in the portrayal of the tragic character of Heracles, as shall be shown in chapters 4.3.2 and 4.3.3.

The representation of Heracles as a character in the *Heracles* of Euripides complements but also contrasts with the representation in *The Trachiniae* in terms of treatment of Heracles. In both plays, Heracles as a character is shown to undergo great personal development; the audience is allowed insight into the emotions of a well-known hero as he is portrayed in these specific

instances. Both plays also expand on the established and familiar view of him for the audience. Furthermore, in both plays, the focus is on the horrific tragedy that has been inflicted on Heracles, and it can be argued that the source of this tragedy in both is the inner conflict that exists within Heracles as a result of his dual natures. Both plays also feature a radical reinterpretation of the myth upon which their plots are based. However, while Euripides presents a Heracles who ultimately suffers as much tragedy as Sophocles' Heracles does, the way in which this suffering is inflicted upon Heracles, as well as the personality this Heracles initially expresses, are seemingly very different from the Sophoclean one.

I argue that despite a portrayal of Heracles in this play that appears very different from that in *The Trachiniae*, the character is no less true to who Heracles is. The variations in personality are reflective of the multitude of divisions inherent to Heracles, a concept which has been discussed throughout this thesis already and specifically in the previous chapter. The *Heracles* highlights the same core issue as *The Trachiniae* does: that Heracles is the victim of internal conflict because he cannot reconcile what he used to be with what he is now. The gulf between his mortal and divine aspects will never allow him peace until he reconciles their separation.

The *Heracles* provides a Heracles who is challenging to understand as a character. The protagonist seems far more immediately-likeable than in *The Trachiniae*, as shall be seen below, but terrible tragedy is nevertheless inflicted upon him. It is however difficult to argue against the validity of such a portrayal because, like Sophocles, Euripides has drawn on aspects of the representation of Heracles in earlier literary works which were well known to the audience, although he chooses to highlight different elements or implications of these earlier portrayals. Section 4.3.2 discusses the way in which elements of the *Heracles* present a character atypical and unusual in comparison to other theatrical portrayals up until this point, as well as the view that ultimately those elements were extremely important in expressing such an in-depth view of Heracles' character. Further to that, section 4.3.3 examines how the *Heracles* presents Heracles as a true suffering hero, and the way in which it fulfils its purpose of being an exceptional tragedy through its tragic hero protagonist. These sections provide the elements needed for a concluding comparison of *The Trachiniae* and *The Heracles* in chapter 5, which offers a final brief comparative discussion of the two plays and their daring re-examinations of Heracles' heroic character.

4.3.2. *The Atypical Portrayal of Heracles*

In much the same way as *The Trachiniae* does, the *Heracles* in its treatment of Heracles contains many aspects that show him in an atypical manner by comparison with other portrayals of the character on stage up until this point. The primary reasons for this are similar to those in *The Trachiniae*, because both plays approach the character of Heracles with a focus on portraying him in a more detailed manner than other plays had typically done, and, most importantly, both present Heracles as a tragic hero within a tragedy. There are again two major sources of inner conflict in Heracles, and both involve the same characteristics inherent to his nature. The first of these is the inner conflict between the Heracles of the past and the Heracles of the present, while the other is the inner conflict between Heracles' divine aspects and his human aspects. However, while these two areas of conflict are similar in the two plays, Euripides in the *Heracles* uses different means to explore these contradictions. These conflicts are discussed here in terms of how they contribute to an atypical characterisation of Heracles:

The natural difficulty in dealing with these conflicts and how they consequently make Heracles atypical in the play is highlighted by Silk (1985: 7), who says:

The pure god, pure hero, pure buffoon, are safe subjects. The suffering Heracles, as a project for tragedy, is exceptionally sensitive material, almost too disturbing, almost taboo. And when tragedy does, eventually, dare to focus on this anomaly, disturbance is conspicuous.

Silk is speaking of Heracles in both plays, and this issue is central to the arguments raised throughout this thesis in respect of how and why it was difficult to portray Heracles in a tragic, suffering manner on stage. For the majority of the *Heracles*, the two inner conflicts are far more closely linked than they were during *The Trachiniae*. This is because in the *Heracles*, Heracles spends a great deal more time on stage and undergoes more clearly-discernable character development and growth related to these conflicts. Unlike in *The Trachiniae*, as Papadimitropoulos (2008: 132) points out, there is no debate about who the protagonist is in the *Heracles*: Heracles as a figure dominates all the events and proceedings within the play, and also spends far less time off-stage.

I start with a discussion of the source of inner conflict for Heracles regarding his past and present personae. Interestingly, a scene that hints at this issue occurs before Heracles even enters the stage. It takes place when Lycus questions Heracles' honour, beginning in line 158, using descriptions of Heracles that seem to reflect the older perceptions of the hero. He does his best to diminish Heracles' achievements, mocking the fact that he is called a hero. Lycus uses two arguments for claiming that Heracles is a coward: that he is most famous for slaying beasts, rather than men, and that his primary weapon in combat is a bow, which Lycus dismisses as a coward's weapon because of its long-distance aspect (Vellacott 1963: 158). Cohen (1994: 695) describes how in the earliest artistic depictions Heracles was always a bowman, but by the time of the 5th century BCE nearly all portrayals showed him as a clubman, making this particular highlighting of the bow seem almost anachronistic. Papadopoulou (2005: 140) argues that the defence Amphitryon makes here for Heracles is to measure him against archaic hero standards, in which individuality and isolation were praised. Notably, by hearing Heracles described in terms of the standards of the archaic hero, the audience is reminded of exactly how long Heracles has been an active hero in Greek literature and of the plurality of characteristics that has accumulated around him with this passage of time.

The main purpose for this early discussion of Heracles as a bowman becomes clear later in the play, after Heracles awakens from his madness. The bow was what Heracles used to slay his family while under the control of Madness. His bow, normally a source of pride to him, now horrifies him. Once his greatest tool of victory and justice, it has now brought him his greatest tragedy, and Heracles himself recognises the irony of this and comments on it towards the end of the play, in lines 1377-1385. His bow is the symbol of his strength, as made clear earlier by Amphitryon, yet now he hates it. He says specifically:

My bow! Which I have loved, and lived with, and now loathe.

What shall I do – keep it, or let it go? This bow

Hung at my side, will talk: 'With me you killed your wife

And children; keep me and you keep their murderer!'

Shall I then keep and carry it? With what excuse?

And yet – disarmed of this – with which I did such deeds

As none in Hellas equalled, must I shamefully
 Yield to my enemies and die? Never! This bow is
 Anguish to me, yet I cannot part with it (Vellacott 1963: 187).

Heracles at this moment seems to perceive the tragedy that inevitably flows from his own inherent character. He is horrified by the realisation that his bow is essentially what made him who he was in the past, and that same violence that was named heroic in the past has destroyed his life in the present. Papadopoulou (2005: 150) argues that Heracles desperately wishes to be rid of his past but acknowledges that this could never be, because to remove all those elements of his past would be to destroy who Heracles is. This situation is a good example of how Euripides shows the atypical Heracles in this play: aspects of the Heracles of the past and the Heracles of the present are shown to co-exist within the same character at an early point in the play. Later, an aspect of the past Heracles then plays an important role in destroying everything for the present Heracles. This in itself could have been merely tragic, but the fact that Euripides has Heracles draw such direct links to this particular inner conflict as being the source of this tragedy is one of the ways in which the protagonist of the *Heracles* is atypical by comparison with other theatre portrayals of him.

Despite the horror Heracles displays at his acts of violence after his madness has left him, during his actual period of madness, as Kamerbeek (1966: 15) comments, we are reminded in shocking detail of the capabilities of the Heracles of old. The violence reported in that scene is a swift departure from the loving family man shown in the earlier portions of the play. In many ways Heracles' speech and actions during his madness seem vaguely buffoonish, as he prances around making proud proclamations of his own power. But as Plato, quoted in Grube (1973: 256) says, "where a weakling would appear ridiculous, a man of strength would appear terrifying," and that is indeed the case here. Kamerbeek (1966: 15) highlights that this is an interesting use of Heracles as a figure: Heracles could be both terrifying and comical at different stages of his literary history. Here, Euripides combines those two contrasting aspects to portray them at the same time in one person.

What Heracles sees in his madness is Eurystheus and his children in the place of his own family, and Heracles resolves to kill them all in return for the hardships Eurystheus had inflicted upon him. The interesting aspect of this, as Kamerbeek (1966: 15) comments, is that in many ways

what Heracles does is precisely the same as what Lycus had wished to do to Heracles' family only a few moments earlier in the play. In this play, Heracles is portrayed in a mostly positive light, but this brief section serves as a reminder that Heracles has before and will again murder some innocent people when in one of his rages, a consistent flaw in his character. *The Trachiniae* too makes mention of such events in at least two different stages.⁵² We see here that even if Heracles is not always so, part of his nature does include the capacity for extreme unprompted violence, and the audience needs to be reminded of that aspect of him as well. This Heracles who is so happy to slay the children of his enemies is a sudden and radical departure from the one who said earlier in lines 633-637:

I never find
Children a trouble. All men are the same at heart
Towards children. Some are of high birth, and some of low; some rich
Some poor; but they all love children – every human soul (Vellacott 1963: 172).

This clash between the Heracles of the past and Heracles of the present serves the purpose, as Kamerbeek (1966: 16) argues, of raising certain questions about the evolving form of Heracles and of heroes in general. Is it still valid to consider the characterisation of a much earlier Heracles, one who has changed in so many ways? Or should that be glossed over and we consider valid only what he has become in the here and now? Euripides seems to have responded in the negative to that latter question, and has elected in this play to combine the older, less-approachable Heracles with the modern, more urban one. Euripides has done it expertly so that both aspects are visible and distinct but meld together to create a more complex character. However, the play still demonstrates a keen understanding of the inevitable conflicts resulting from combining the various elements of Heracles in one figure. This brings more flaws into his personality and consequently invites further tragedy, but it is the mark of a daring playwright to be willing to flesh out such a character rather than leaving him flat and one-dimensional and entirely avoiding an exploration of his nature. The boldness of portraying such a Heracles as the protagonist in this play is part of the reason for the perception of that Heracles as atypical.

⁵² For example, in lines 45 and 442

The second major source of internal conflict within Heracles avoided by other playwrights⁵³ is the gulf between his human and divine sides. This is not as obviously present in the *Heracles* as it was in *The Trachiniae*. However, it still makes a definite contribution to the play and adds to the atypicality of the Heracles character in the *Heracles*. Silk (1985: 18) argues that the closing scenes in both *The Trachiniae* and *Heracles* represent the conflict between Heracles' human and divine natures, and that in both the conflict has reached such a peak of turmoil that it can only be resolved by destroying one of the two aspects, and then isolating and focusing on what remains. Silk's (1985: 18) argument is that in *The Trachiniae*, Heracles accepts his heroic duty and then dies, leaving his human side behind; in the *Heracles*, the opposite occurs: Heracles rejects the gods and also the god within him, and leaves the stage relying on human kindness instead. Silk (1985: 19) concludes his argument by saying:

That explosion - the madness - is presented as an arbitrary explosion such as gods create, but also as a necessary explosion, necessary in metaphysical terms as well as necessary on the level of character. The combination of god and man is unstable and must be blown apart to permit a new, simpler and comprehensible stability, whereby Heracles becomes a suffering man in whom we can believe and to whom we can relate. The cost of the explosion is very great. Much is destroyed: not only Megara and the children and Heracles' life in Thebes, but his status as a god. Hera and the gods are arbitrary and inexplicable. The pious, wretched figure who leaves the stage leaning on a friend is a representative of lucid humanity with no god left in him.

Such a violent "explosion," in the way Silk uses it as a metaphor above, might imply that it would not have been easy for a typical audience or even a playwright to engage with this treatment of Heracles. As mentioned throughout this thesis and particularly in section 3.3, the typical approach to portraying Heracles on stage outside of *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* had been to present him as entirely divine or mortal, while glossing over the complicated dual nature relationship between these two aspects. What Silk is saying is that Euripides made a far more dramatic decision: he portrayed both aspects of Heracles on stage at the same time, and then

⁵³ The only known exception to this is of course Sophocles with *The Trachiniae*, written roughly 10 years prior to the *Heracles*. One of the main points of this thesis as a whole is that these two plays were exceptional rather than the norm, and one of the aims of these sections as a whole is to explore why this may have been so.

caused Heracles violently to reject one of those aspects completely by the end of the play. To take the incredibly popular figure of Heracles and show that his very nature is destructive and will remain destructive to all those around him unless it is recreated in some way, would have made the *Heracles* very distinct in terms of how it portrayed Heracles on stage. This goes some way to explaining why the Heracles of this play was so atypical; it is exceedingly difficult to portray such a radical departure from a well-known character in a meaningful way, and most would have avoided doing so.

Silk (1985: 19), speaking of both plays but with this still applicable to the *Heracles*, argues for why the atypical Heracles emerged at all:

The distinctive features of the two plays derive from their special common feature, the hero Heracles. As a dangerously disturbing hero, he is avoided by the tragedians. Comedy values disturbance; other genres can simplify it; but not tragedy. When the tragedians do dramatize the sufferings of Heracles, he produces disruptions at various levels. His presence dislocates the overall structure. On the level of character, it produces a huge imbalance of sympathy in *Trachiniae* and a credibility gap, violently filled, in *Heracles*. Besides this, it generates a number of otherwise inexplicable features, of which the coming of the madness in Heracles and the missing apotheosis in *Trachiniae* are the most obvious. The suffering Heracles embodies too much in the way of ideals and taboos to do anything less. 'The purpose of myth', according to Levi-Strauss, 'is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction.' The Heracles myth, on the contrary, is all contradiction itself, contradiction which the tragedians explore at some cost to the tragic norms and to our emotions.

With such reasoning, the answer to why *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* were the only two plays with such an atypical Heracles becomes clearer. The above quote implies that to present Heracles in such a way would essentially be to challenge both the genre of tragedy itself and the established expectations of the audience. In many ways, it would be a great risk for a playwright to do so. As Silk states, a comedy could get away with ridiculing or challenging social conventions and established, well-liked figures, because the audience knew to expect such, and knew not to take its claims too seriously beyond the world of satire and ribald commentary.

However, when a tragedy does the same it becomes serious criticism, and many people find it difficult to align themselves with criticism of highly-regarded systems and figures. This also clarifies to some extent why these plays are important for modern scholarship regarding Heracles. Having concluded the examination of the ways in which the *Heracles* differs from other plays in its portrayal of Heracles, the following section will now show how it succeeds as a tragedy, in the manner in which it inflicts tragedy and suffering on Heracles.

4.3.3. *The Suffering Heracles*

Section 4.3.3 aims to demonstrate some of the major elements used in the *Heracles* which highlight how the play treats Heracles as a true tragic hero. Similar to *The Trachiniae*, apart from all the unusual aspects that stem from the involvement of Heracles this play is primarily a good example of a tragedy and of how a tragic hero is treated as a protagonist in this genre (Papadopoulou: 2005: 1). The tragic influences in the *Heracles* bear some similarity to those in *The Trachiniae*. However, this is largely because the root causes for the tragedy in both plays (namely, the internal conflicts within Heracles, as described in section 4.2.2 and 4.3.2) are the same. Euripides' depiction of Heracles as a suffering hero is clearly distinct from Sophocles' portrayal. Yet, like *The Trachiniae*, the *Heracles* ultimately implies that tragedy comes to Heracles as the result of his own nature, even if the causes initially appear to be external in many ways. Heracles suffers because his own existence is an anomaly in a world so radically changed from the largely-hierarchical one he previously inhabited.

The major tragic elements discussed in this section are the following: Euripides, much as Sophocles does, seems to emphasise the emotional gulf between Heracles and ordinary people. As in *The Trachiniae*, there is tension between the legend of Heracles and the ordinary, very human Heracles now presented on stage. But the third major tragic element here is centred on Hera's hatred and her unfair treatment of Heracles, and derives from the ways in which Heracles' own nature and actions have contributed to this.

In many ways, the *Heracles* seems to present Heracles in a far more positive light than *The Trachiniae* does. As Mikalson (1974: 96) states, no-one in the *Heracles* is as pious as Heracles himself, which makes the divine punishment that is to come all the more tragic. On an immediate level, Heracles is a much more likeable character than he is in *The Trachiniae*; his antagonists

are easy to identify, and the ending has a more optimistic tone. However, this thesis would argue that this does not diminish the tragic elements and perhaps even heightens them, precisely because Heracles is so much more likeable. When tragedy is inflicted upon him here, it elicits more sympathy from the audience. Heracles' internal conflicts, which influence much of the tragedy, in turn add further depth to this sympathy, as a popular figure being undone by his own nature is especially tragic. Also, although Heracles' antagonists are easily identifiable, they are nearly impossible to combat, as the primary force against Heracles is Hera, queen of the gods. While the ending does have some optimistic qualities and the play comes to a satisfactory resolution within itself, at the same time there is nothing to prevent similar tragedies happening to Heracles again at his new home. Hera's opposition to him has remained unchanged, and as an audience we already know that Heracles will remarry and that his own nature will finally contribute to his death.

Unlike in *The Trachiniae*, the first tragic element, the emotional disconnect here between Heracles and ordinary people is not between himself and his family. In the *Heracles*, Heracles has a decidedly positive relationship with all his family members. Indeed, some of the tragedy inflicted upon Heracles is emphasised by the very fact that his relationship with his family is so strong. When Heracles arrives on stage and we get our first view of the man himself, we witness his extreme happiness at being back with his home and family. He says the following in lines 522-525:

Greetings, my house! And greeting, doorway to

My hearth!

What happiness to see you, as I come at last

Back to the living world (Vellacott 1963: 169)!

Papadopoulou (2005: 8) argues that although it can be difficult to discern tone in a text that was intended to be performed, the manner in which Heracles enters the home here surely shows an exceptionally boisterous and jovial man, full of love and adoration for his home including the comforts it offers and his family that resides within it. This is not the Heracles of *The Trachiniae* and other pieces, who seems irresistibly drawn to travelling the world and compelled to find new targets to defeat and conquests to make. This Heracles, as mentioned in the opening lines of the play, set forth on his Labours only to aid his mortal father, and could not be happier to be home.

And happy as he is to be home, he is quick to be filled with grave concern when he sees his family disturbed and distressed, wearing their sacrificial garments.

Immediately following this speech, Heracles continues in a manner that confirms his devotion to his family, in lines 574-582:

Should I not help my wife, my sons
 My father, before the rest of the world? Good-bye to all
 My famous labours! They're a waste of time, while I
 Neglect to help my own. These boys were to be killed
 For bearing my name; then in their defence I must
 Die, if need be. At Eurystheus' command I fought
 The Lion and the Hydra; what honour comes of that
 Unless I avenge the threat to my own children's lives?

I'll never again be known as Conquering Heracles (Vellacott 1963: 169).

The fact that Heracles would be willing to give up all his great achievements in order to safeguard his family is both extremely heart-warming and utterly tragic in the face of what is to come. The sad irony of the entire play is exemplified in this passage: the man who would do anything to keep his family alive is later tricked into killing them. This Heracles is willing to turn his attention to a domestic life, but he is kept from this by the nature that makes him who he is. Quite unlike the Heracles of *The Trachiniae*, this Heracles evokes our sympathy very directly: as an audience, we witness his great love for his family and his passionate desire to protect them and do the right thing; we also witness how all of that counts for naught, when he destroys them due to elements in himself that he cannot control. Heracles considers his family to be the most valuable thing in his life; when he loses them he becomes a broken shell of a previously great man. The theme of someone trying desperately to prevent a disaster which they themselves ultimately bring about is an exceptionally tragic aspect of this play, one that runs from beginning to end. It is an exceedingly effective tool in a tragedy for eliciting emotion from the audience, but only if the character is as likeable as Heracles is here.

Primarily however the play focuses on the tragic gulf between Heracles and the ordinary mortals around him, and this is especially highlighted when Heracles' strong friendship with Theseus is contrasted with the failings of his friends and neighbours. When Heracles returns from his Labours and is reunited with Megara, one of their first conversations is about the fickleness of their neighbours, in lines 547 and 554-558:

Megara: We had no friends to help us; you, we heard, were dead.

...

Heracles: But – in my absence, what became of all our friends?

Megara: When a man meets misfortune, who stays true to him?

Heracles: They shrugged off all I went through in the Minyan War?

Megara: Of course. Luckless is friendless, as I just said so (Vellacott 1963: 170).

Now, when Heracles hears about the situation his family is facing, compounded by their abandonment by the townsfolk, a familiar characteristic comes to the fore and we are reminded of his violently angry, vengeful side. He says in lines 565-574:

Now I must go; my hand has work to do. And first,
To level with the ground the house of this new king,
Cut off his head, and throw it out for the dogs to tear;
Then, for the citizens of Cadmus, those I find
Have paid my benefits with treachery, this club,
Veteran of many victories, shall deal with them;
Or with my feathered barbs I'll scatter them, and fill
Ismenus full of corpses, make the limpid stream
Of Dirce run red (Vellacott 1963: 170).

The vividly violent image conjured up by Heracles' words is aimed at the treacherous neighbours but is also potentially unsettling for the audience. To Heracles, this is a purely black-and-white issue, a perspective consistent with his inherent heroic nature. It is expected of a hero like himself to prioritise loyalty between friends and to ignore his own safety in order to repay what is owed, and Theseus too acts in a similar manner later in the play. The virtues of heroism, as

shown in chapter 2 of this thesis, are very much centred on loyalty, nobility, and honourable behaviour. To act against these precepts would have been unthinkable for Heracles, and it is hard for him to understand that not everyone would make the choices he does. This rigid, unbending nature of Heracles is another of his faults, emphasised in multiple instances of literature, as Papadopoulou (2005: 5) argues. We are also reminded of what was described in chapters 4.2.2 and 4.2.3 above: that there is a perpetual gulf between heroes and ordinary mortals, and an even wider gulf between divinities and mortals. It is this that elicits the most intense tragedy in this situation too. Heracles and the townsfolk are not “bad people” (if such a simplistic term is appropriate); they are all simply acting in the best way they can, according to their own personal worldviews. But the ever-present gulf that remains between them is the source of tragedy in this instance, Conacher (1955: 150) argues, even if this serves only to highlight how Heracles now lives in a world that he no longer understands.

Several authors comment on the emphasis in the play on how ordinary friendships fail for Heracles while his friendships with other heroes are glorified. Scholars like Pike (1977: 82), Silk (1985: 18) and Papadimitropoulos (2008: 138) point out that in the ordinary world heroes were revered, but were ultimately incomprehensible to ordinary people; they lived with entirely different values and different day-to-day realities. Furthermore, the gods too were incomprehensible to all mortal groups. A strict hierarchy was maintained between them, and the direct experience one level had of the others was minimal. Silk (1985: 18) argues that Heracles, embodying both god and man in one person, not only collapsed that hierarchy within himself, but that his life consisted of causing interactions between groups that would never normally have met in such a way and indeed perhaps never should have met, an argument raised also by Papadimitropoulos (2008: 138). Heracles will never be able to understand the ordinary people fully, so he is frustrated with them, and they too will never be able to understand him. Heracles and Theseus have a strong friendship precisely because they have both been tried and tested in ways that only other heroes can appreciate or understand. As Pike (1977: 82) points out specifically, the same qualities that make Heracles a fine and admirable father and husband here also contain the seeds of destruction, because, as Pike expresses it, the strongman-figure in myth is driven by something beyond what an ordinary wife or family could ever completely satisfy. Inevitably, tragedy flows from such pairings. What this tragic element in the play implies is that Heracles could never be wholly emotionally connected to anyone else around him, not even his

friends and family, despite his great longing to forge such links. In and of itself this is a source of great tragedy for the very sympathetic Heracles of this play. He is most comfortable with Theseus, and his interactions with him are extremely important, as Silk (1985: 18) emphasises:

The logic of Euripides' drama is dependent on his inversion of events in the myth. ...By abandoning the sequence of madness followed by labours, he avoids any suggestion that Heracles can be redeemed by a saviour-god's exercise of his superhuman powers. Only the human values of friendship can provide that redemption; and this representation of friendship as a Heracleian resource is itself a departure from mythic tradition of the most radical kind.

In other words, as Conacher (1955: 149) argues, Heracles has to step radically outside of his comfort zone in order to resolve the drama of this play. He has to trust Theseus, and cast himself out into a new, unknown world, one where he is much more dependent on others. The final scene, in which Heracles leaves the stage leaning on Theseus, is demonstrative of this. This vision of friendship helps end the play on a slightly more hopeful note than that of *The Trachiniae*, but as Papadimitopoulos (2008: 137) reminds us, the root causes of the tragedy, which are situated within Heracles' own psyche, have not been affected or changed in any way. Heracles' divided nature has not been resolved and most certainly holds the potential to affect his life in a terrible manner again in the future. The *Heracles* as a play ends here, but an audience might well remember that within the greater narrative of Heracles' own life, the events with his second wife and family are still to come.

The second way in which tragedy is inflicted on Heracles in the play is related to the concepts of reliability and believability in the world of the theatre itself, and how these affect a character such as Heracles who exists only in the world of myth. Both Conacher (1955: 14) and Mikalson (1974: 96) explore this element in various ways. The text most relevant to this point is drawn from only one particular section of speech in the play, lines 1341-1346 where Heracles addresses Theseus, but it has ramifications for the play as a whole. In this section, Theseus is trying to convince Heracles not to give in to his grief, on the grounds that poets have long told stories of how the gods themselves have acted poorly many times, and that because they did so Heracles should not feel so despondent about what he has done. Heracles responds:

What you say of the Gods is hardly relevant.
 I don't believe gods tolerate unlawful love.
 These tales of chainings are unworthy; I never did
 And never will accept them; nor that any god
 Is tyrant of another. A god, if truly god,
 Needs nothing. These are poet's lamentable myths (Vellacott 1963: 196).

This text is important because once again we are reminded that it is the divide between the divine and the human which creates conflict and therefore tragedy for Heracles; the words of the extract have potentially huge consequences. The easiest response, as Mikalson (1974: 97) reasons, is to regard this as simply Heracles' opinion at a very emotionally-charged time. This is certainly a valid view because it is consistent with Heracles' character; he has spent a lifetime serving the gods and to accept that they are as fundamentally flawed as humans are will undermine the efforts of his entire life. I argue that this view is also consistent with a certain kind of idealism which may be seen as part of Heracles' character. In his opinion, a god is only worthy of being called a god if he or she does not fall prey to the same weaknesses as humans do. This is particularly striking when we recall Heracles' ultimate fate at the end of his life. It is also emotionally effective for an audience to watch Heracles describe this point of view: he has such high expectations of the gods, yet he misses the irony of the fact that he exists only because of one of these moral lapses of which he says the gods are incapable. Seen this way, Heracles is rejecting the entire premise of his existence in order to maintain the dignity of the gods.

Conacher (1955: 142) argues differently, saying that this dialogue stems not primarily from Heracles' heightened emotions, but that it is an example of Euripidean style and Euripidean viewpoints about humanity:

In other plays (in the *Hippolytus* and the *Bacchae*, for example) Euripides takes the myth seriously, but implies that the significance of the tragic action presented lies not in the divine motivation (which, by convention, the plot of the play accepts from the myth) but in an underlying "natural" motivation: the operation of certain fatal factors in the drama of the human psyche.

In other words, Euripides emphasises the human elements that drive the drama of a play and downplays the divine influences as being less relevant. As Conacher (1955: 142) argues, this places the primary focus in the play back on Heracles and his own attitudes and responses to what is happening around him. The divide between Heracles' human and divine aspects is one of the central core elements of his character, and that division is clearly present not only in this play but also in *The Trachiniae*. An overall question is created by this discussion of a play's truth as an adaptation, in relation to the myth upon which it is based: is the tragedy inflicted on Heracles heightened, or diminished, if one accepts this play as just another example of a "poet's lamentable myth," as line 1346 describes it? This is a question that cannot be answered categorically, but to address the nature of storytelling itself through the character of Heracles certainly adds another dimension to the tragic elements affecting Heracles in this play.

Further to the discussion of this tragic element is Papadimitropoulou's (2008: 138) argument that lines 1345-1346 signify a subconscious breaking with the gods for Heracles, who has now found them imperfect by comparison with his previous worship of them. Now, Heracles not only seeks the company of mortals, he actively depends on other people. Distanced from the gods, mortals are his only succour. A purposeful depiction of humanity as more desirable than divinity in any way is unusual in any play in this context, and as Papadimitropoulou (2008: 138) points out, it is even more significant here, because it is Heracles who is making this decision: he cannot escape his own dual nature.

The final tragic element on which this thesis focuses is the actions of the gods towards Heracles, specifically Hera's active persecution and Zeus' passive abandonment. This point also addresses the source of the major tragic events for Heracles in the drama, and leads to an exploration of the question of who is to blame. The issue of blame is important because as shall be shown, despite the tragedy inflicted on him through the external actions of the gods, the drama seems to suggest strongly that the root cause remains Heracles' own internal conflicts.

In the play, Zeus is regarded (primarily by Amphytrion towards the start of the play)⁵⁴ as the representative of justice, but his lack of direct involvement eventually influences all the

⁵⁴ In lines 47 and 146.

characters. The apparent indifference of the gods is echoed in the words of the Chorus in lines 657-670, while Heracles has left the stage to kill Lycus:

If the gods had any understanding
 And wisdom, as men conceive it,
 A second youth should be awarded
 To distinguish those whose lives were virtuous.
 Such men after one death
 Would rise again into the sun's beams
 And run a double course of life,
 While ignoble natures enjoyed but one span.
 In this way, it would be possible
 To distinguish the good men from bad,
 As through the bright company of stars.
 But gods make no clear division
 Between goodness and wickedness (Vellacott 1963: 173).

This speech has multiple levels of meaning, as I interpret it. Firstly, the notion of good men receiving a second youth (literally, *Hebe*) is a kind of dramatic irony and foreshadowing that the audience would have appreciated, for after death Heracles receives this reward in the most literal way: he becomes divine and marries Hebe. However, within this play, the worst tragedy is still to come. The oblique hint does little to compensate for what is about to occur, and it is significant that the lines occur before, rather than after, the tragedy itself. In the play, Zeus takes no observable direct action either to alleviate or enhance the suffering of Heracles, despite Heracles' constant invocation of his father. Silk (1985: 17) argues that the inaction of Zeus contributes to the conclusion of the play, and Silk claims that it is a major factor in Heracles' rejection of divinity and embracing of his own humanity.

As a counterpoint to the apparent inaction of Zeus, Hera is very active towards Heracles in the later scenes of this play. Significantly, when she sends Iris and Madness to infect him, Iris speaks of what they do to Heracles as a "punishment." Iris mentions that this is motivated by Hera's

anger towards Heracles; however, she is also personally pleased to be able to act against Heracles in such a way because she shares Hera's hatred for him. Madness herself is described as merely a servant, and she cautions against driving Heracles mad, on the grounds that he has done so much good for the worlds of both men and gods. She says in line 841: "He alone restored the worship due to gods, fallen to decay through men's impiety." Iris rebukes Madness, telling her to remain quiet and do her duty, and the issue of the gods owing a debt to Heracles for his service is not touched on again in any depth in the play.

Lines 825-832 and 839-840 contain an important element for an understanding of why Hera and Iris are so eager to inflict harm upon Heracles. Mikalson (1974: 95) argues that there are two reasons for the significance of these lines: firstly the discussion of why they are allowed to act against Heracles now; and secondly why, according to Hera and Iris, Heracles deserves these actions against him:

Before he had accomplished all,
His fearful labours, Fate preserved him, nor would Zeus
His father permit me or Hera to raise hand
Against him; but now, that he has performed in full
Eurystheus' tasks, Hera desires (and I am with her)
To fasten on Heracles the guilt of kindred blood.
...
If Heracles escapes our punishment, then gods
Are nowhere, and the mortal race may rule the earth (Vellacott 1963: 179).

The initial lines of this speech make very clear that during the course of his Labours Zeus and Fate protected Heracles, and Hera can act against him only now that he has concluded them. Furthermore, it is apparent that both Hera and Iris deeply desire to do what they are about to do to Heracles, and they experience some joy at finally being able to do so. However, the last two lines are of vital importance here, indicating as they do that this is not simply Hera moving against Heracles because she personally desires to do so: it is an active and specific punishment. According to Hera and Madness, Heracles has done something deserving of such punishment. As Mikalson (1974: 95) claims, the total absence of Zeus during this seems to imply his tacit

consent, though not necessarily his approval. Further, Zeus' tacit consent may be linked to the implication raised by line 839-840: that if Heracles is not punished, the absolute authority of the gods may be brought into question. But if Heracles needs to be punished, asks Kamerbeek (1966: 10), of what is he guilty? What could inspire such terrible tragedy as a fitting response to that guilt?

Heracles does not hear this portion of the speech; later in the play it becomes clear that in his opinion Hera is simply persecuting him as she always has, in her rage at the fact that he was Zeus' favoured son despite having been born from a mortal woman out of wedlock. Certainly for him, and perhaps for many in the audience, this is a valid assumption, as he lists the myriad ways in which Hera has attacked him or angered him over the years. In a particularly bitter speech in lines 1303-1309, Heracles says:

Now let Zeus's wife,
Glorious Hera, shake Olympus with her shoe,
Dancing for joy! She has achieved all her heart's desire,
Toppling to earth, pedestal and all, the foremost man
Of Hellas. Who could pray to such a god? For spite
Towards Zeus, for jealousy of a woman's bed, she hurls
To ruin this country's saviour, innocent of wrong (Vellacott 1963: 194)!

However, this explanation sidesteps the issues of the particular wording Iris uses and the fact that Zeus does nothing to stop the punishment. Many scholars argue that Heracles is in fact guilty: Conacher (1955: 151), Kamerbeek (1966: 10), Mikalson (1974: 96) and Papadopoulou (2005: 192) suggest that Heracles has fallen prey to hubris in some way. However, it is unclear how this could have occurred, because the accepted presentation of hubris in Greek mythological literature involves a mortal purposefully engaging with the gods in an attempt to prove their own equality or superiority (Papadopoulou 2005: 192). An example of this is Bellerophon, who sought to fly to Olympus and live there forever and was struck down by the gods for his impiety. What crime could Heracles, presented here as pious, honourable and sympathetic, have committed that would equal Bellerophon's arrogance? It should be remembered that in this play Heracles returns from doing his long and dedicated duty to the gods, during which he has

extensively honoured them and never criticised them. Even Madness acknowledges that it is due to Heracles that the worship of gods continues. Mikalson (1974: 96) points out that in every regard in this play, Heracles' piety is both exceptional and exemplary. So how then might he be guilty of hubris?

A partial explanation can be found in a particular aspect of the Greek conception of heroism, highlighted by Grube (1973: 255) and already mentioned in Section 2.2: "...the Greek feeling that too much might, too great a strength and power, is in and of itself a dangerous thing." This might very well apply to Heracles, who is considered by many within the play, and possibly within the audience too, to be the greatest man who has ever lived. However, Heracles has been this "greatest of men" for some considerable time at the point this play takes place, and my own interpretation is that if it were only a divine legal technicality making it necessary to wait to the end of his Labours before administering well-deserved punishment, the drama of the play becomes significantly less effective. But there is one final aspect of Heracles' deeds that might very well condemn him on the grounds of hubris, even if that was not his intention.

In the play, Heracles has just returned from his final Labour of bringing Cerberus out of the Underworld. This was a remarkable act performed by a remarkable man, but has far-reaching implications for the relations between mortals and the gods. Griffiths (2002: 649), for example, quotes Shelten as stating that:

Herakles' return from the Underworld signifies the crossing of the most rigid boundary between immortals and mortals and poses a threat to the gods. His journey to capture Cerberus causes his highest glory and his greatest despair.

Griffiths' (2002: 649) interpretation highlights the necessity of keeping in mind the dual concept of the Underworld held by the Greeks and reflected in their literature. The Underworld exists in a physical space and a person can descend into it, but once there is considered to be dead. Only the greatest of heroes have ever passed through the Underworld and come out on the other side. When Heracles' family speaks about him at the start of the play, they refer to him as dead based on their knowledge that he is in the Underworld.⁵⁵ Although Heracles succeeds in returning from

⁵⁵ As seen in lines 116-117.

the Underworld, it is possible that his deeds there incriminated him.⁵⁶ Heracles performed two major actions in the Underworld: he freed Theseus and brought him back to the world of the living, and he brought Cerberus up onto the earth, removing him from his position as gatekeeper. The act of returning Theseus to life might have been overlooked, as Grube (1973: 255) reasons, because one remarkable hero beloved by the gods saving another hero beloved by the gods seems consistent with other exceptional acts performed by Heracles that were acclaimed rather than punished. However, as Griffiths (2002: 646) argues, the matter of Cerberus is more critical. When Cerberus is removed, there is nothing to stop souls entering or exiting the Underworld at will. By capturing Cerberus, Heracles has (although probably unwittingly) committed a bold and terrible offence: he has removed that which defines the distinction between mortal and immortal.

Grube (1973: 255) also points out how Euripides intensifies the tragedy of this act of Heracles. Grube's argument is that within this play Heracles resembles in many respects the great Dorian heroes of old, those of the Homeric era, when mankind and their heroes were believed to be at the height of mortal achievement. According to Grube (1973: 255), in this play Heracles has reached a pinnacle, surpassing even what was thought possible for him, and yet at his moment of triumph he is not to be rewarded, but punished instead. Euripides thus shows how greatness becomes a crime, because in a world governed by such supernatural forces as one sees in the Greek gods, true greatness is the only division between divinity and ordinary mortals. Heracles' demonstration to mankind that all you need to do to become like the gods is to work exceptionally hard is a dangerous concept and Heracles might well deserve to be struck down for it. Grube (1973: 256) argues that this is why it is absolutely necessary that Heracles' madness is seen to be instilled by Iris and Madness rather than as deriving from his own internal qualities; the fact that this is a punishment inflicted upon Heracles is of utmost importance to the play as a whole.

Papadopoulou (2005: 119) also highlights the point that has been mentioned earlier in this thesis: that there is an ever-present divide between gods and mortals, and mortals are never fully capable of understanding the desires of the gods; the play repeatedly shows people who believe that they understand the gods while in fact they do not. Papadopoulou (2005: 128) argues that the

⁵⁶ In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus also returns from the Underworld, but line 297 in the *Heracles* does claim that no man has ever returned from the Underworld, so perhaps within the context of this play, that supposition should be taken for dramatic effect.

gods' ultimate purpose is to maintain the hierarchy of the world, and thereby conserve order in the world. Silk (1985: 16) argues that although Heracles is able to associate with the gods through his divine dimension, his mortal side is not permitted to do so. He is therefore guilty of transgressing the most important of boundaries, albeit by accident. I suggest that an argument could even be constructed to show that what seems in the play to be the neglect of the gods for humans is in fact the gods acting in humanity's best interests. This does not justify the pleasure taken by Iris and Hera at Heracles' undoing, but the gods were never thought to be perfect, however strongly Heracles wishes they might be.

The greatest tragedy of the play therefore seems the fact that Heracles is being punished simply for being Heracles, penalised for acting according to his own nature, which until this point has had extensive positive effects for both gods and men. Now, it all seems very much out of his hands. But I suggest another possible interpretation of the tragic elements in this play, which I extrapolate from the previous discussion of the issue of Heracles' guilt. Worth considering in relation to Heracles are the ways in which a legend is spoken about by others and the fact that the stories concerning a figure begin to take on a reality outside of their own control over them. It is true that characters throughout this play speak very boldly of Heracles' good deeds, with no encouragement from him to do so, but it is also true that they refer to him in a way that might seem somewhat impious. It is perhaps understandable when Amphytrion speaks of his son in glowing terms, as a father is permitted to do, but the real danger comes from the Chorus which praises Heracles excessively, to the point of impropriety. In the play the Chorus represents a position close to that inhabited by the ordinary person, and perhaps therefore is representative of how the average person might overpraise Heracles. Lines 347-452 contain an enumeration of the many great Labours done by Heracles, after which Heracles goes into the palace to slay Lycus. From lines 637 to 700 the Chorus delivers fulsome praise for Heracles, concluding with lines 696-700:

Heracles is the son of Zeus

And has surpassed the glory of his birth

With the Labours of his noble life;

By destroying beasts of which men lived in terror

He won for us the tranquillity we all enjoy (Vellacott 1963: 174).

Anyone hearing this would understand how dangerous such words are, even in the implications they contain. But to say, so flippantly, that Heracles might possibly be nobler than Zeus because of what he has done, is exceptionally thoughtless. Moreover, moments before Iris and Madness appear, the Chorus again praises Heracles in lines 804-809:

For the passing of time has made shine in the eyes of the world
The Greatness of Heracles
Who came up from the palace of Pluto,
Up from the chambers of the earth.
I judge you, Heracles, more fit by birth to rule
Than the mean king of yesterday (Vellacott 1963: 178).

Heracles has returned mere moments earlier, and he is already receiving worshipful adoration from the Chorus for having conquered the Underworld. It may be argued that if Heracles is guilty, through his actions, of impropriety towards the gods and his station, his worshipful treatment by the average people (represented by the Chorus) may very well make it necessary for the gods to punish him. A tragic aspect of this of course is that Heracles himself did not order people to adore him: they did so spontaneously. This demonstrates yet another way in which some of the tragedy in this play arises from Heracles' inherent nature. Although unintentional on his part, the very fact that he might nevertheless be guilty of a crime against the natural order of the world through merely being who he is, adds an extra dimension of tragedy.

Many of the tragic elements in the *Heracles* stem from what happens when Heracles' own nature begins to act against him. Much as *The Trachiniae* did, the *Heracles* demonstrates how Heracles brings tragedy upon himself through simply being what he is. Whether he is failing in relationships with others, doubting his own purpose, or killing his family, the implication of the play may be that there is the inescapable potential for danger within Heracles, and that this potential easily manifests in tragedy and suffering. That the Heracles of this play is so personable and sympathetic only makes it harder for the audience to witness the tragic events and the suffering he endures.

The Heracles depicted by Euripides is almost certainly more "human" than the Heracles of *The Trachiniae*. In Euripides' play, Heracles is a well-rounded figure with visible character failings.

However, his strength of character and warmth of emotion towards his family remind us of the reasons for his enduring popularity as a figure in Greek culture, a popularity which may seem baffling after witnessing his ineptitude in human relationships in *The Trachiniae*. Euripides' great strength in the *Heracles* is his deft blending of aspects of former stages of Heracles' characterisation, from the earliest Homeric form to the then-current persona as the moral champion of Athenian civic life, while creating a complete and entirely believable character. In the *Heracles* Euripides depicts Heracles as a hero who is diverse and complex. On the one hand he remains the popular figure dominant in other depictions of him; on the other hand, the more problematic and tragic aspects of Heracles' character are not glossed over. It is vitally important to remember this complex nature of Heracles because without it, there would be no potential for naturally-occurring tragedy. As the above sections have shown, although Heracles undoubtedly is a personable, noble figure, it is the ever-present divide between his human and divine aspects that gives rise to all the tragedy that befalls him. The depiction here of Heracles as so congenial only accentuates this point: Heracles cannot ever escape his own nature, and it is particularly poignant to witness the infliction of tragedy inflicted upon someone so very likable. The *Heracles* repeatedly uses this as a dramatic device to engage the audience in the full extent of Heracles' suffering: it is extremely effective and emotionally wrenching only because the audience has identified so closely with Heracles.

Section 4.3, and indeed the entirety of chapter 4, has attempted to demonstrate that in many ways it was immensely difficult for a playwright to address the complex internal struggles necessary to depict Heracles as a tragic character. Many perhaps would have found it too emotionally-challenging to engage with the conflicts that would naturally arise from placing the entire, complex Heracles in a realistic environment. As Silk (1985: 7) puts it:

If (to speak in formulae) tragic-suffering man is man's image of his own essential condition, and if god is his projection of what he would, but dare not, aspire to, and is, instead, a helpless prey to, then the enactment of tragic-suffering god-man threatens to involve its audience in an existential inquisition of an uncommonly powerful and painful kind.

Not every playwright and audience would be willing to accept an inquisition of the most powerful and painful kind at the theatre, especially if it were handled poorly. However, the dual

nature of god and mortal within Heracles that creates this level of drama is fundamental to his persona, and it would do a disservice to his detailed and rich character as a whole to include an individual named Heracles without these aspects. The complexities highlighted in this chapter probably contribute significantly to the reasons for many scholars not approaching the *Heracles* and even *The Trachiniae* in depth for so long a period of time, and why both plays were considered especially unusual and seen as depicting atypical portrayals of Heracles.

This brings to an end the analyses of specific tragic elements in the two plays under examination here. Chapter 5 provides a comparative summary that aims to demonstrate that this thesis has addressed the major questions raised in the introduction in chapter 1. Conclusive answers to such questions remain difficult to reach, but it is hoped that the discussions in this thesis have aided in highlighting some of the major arguments and debates surrounding the central issues, and that the value of these questions to the field of scholarship surrounding Heracles as a whole has been demonstrated.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This thesis seeks to answer the question of how the portrayal of Heracles as a tragic hero in Sophocles' *The Trachiniae* and Euripides' *Heracles* differs from previous depictions of him in literature. It also examines the problematic nature of using existing traditions about Heracles in the creation of a convincing character who is both the invincible hero of old and a man now suffering unspeakable tragedy, a character who is also both mortal and divine.

Chapter 1 introduces these questions within the scope of this thesis, and explains the background to the questions as well as the approach taken in the attempt to answer them. My examination of secondary literature indicates that a close comparative study of *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles*, focusing primarily on Heracles' role and his portrayal as a suffering, tragic hero, might fill a small gap in scholarship at the level of this thesis. Comparatively few scholarly works discuss either of these two plays; even fewer take the characterisation of Heracles as a central concept. There is also only a very small number of comparative studies of the tragedies.

Chapter 2 investigates some aspects of the role played by heroes in Greek society, examining how they were conceived and worshipped and how amongst them Heracles in particular was treated. The importance of Heracles as a figure, his unique level of popularity, and his atypical portrayal in *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* can only be properly understood against the background of an understanding of Greek heroism. Chapter 2 looks at Greek heroes in general as well as at characteristics particular to Heracles alone. The chapter discusses the way in which Greek heroes were worshipped, admired and portrayed in the genre of tragedy as well as the way in which heroes as a group were distinct from ordinary mortals, and it emphasises that Heracles is exceptional when compared to other Greek heroes. It shows that he was distinct in the level of overall appeal he held and in the ways in which he was applied politically in Greek society leading up to and including the fifth century BCE. He was exceptional in respect of the societal boundaries that were broken through his popularity, appealing as he did to every level and class of humanity. Most importantly however, he was distinguished by the fact that he eventually achieved immortality. As Heracles became more popular, particularly after the general acceptance of his deification, the ways in which Heracles' paradigm was employed became

noticeably more fixed or formalised, and this was particularly the case in fifth century BCE Athens.

Chapter 3 of this thesis is also a contextual chapter, containing information about the world of Greek tragic theatre and Heracles' place within it. The chapter discusses how a playwright interacts with a play and with his audience, looks at tragedy as a genre as well as Heracles' history of involvement as a character in the world of theatre up until the fifth century BCE. Finally, the chapter discusses how viewing the development of Heracles over time as a figure on stage highlights the distinctive ways in which he is portrayed *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles*. Before the writing of the two plays discussed in this thesis, the roles played by Heracles were extremely limited and simplified and he was not brought on stage as a central tragic protagonist.

Chapter 4 provides an examination of *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles*, with specific focus on Heracles as a character within the plays. After a brief introduction to the plays, section 4.2 looks at *The Trachiniae*, followed by a discussion of the *Heracles* in section 4.3. The sections follow a similar format, opening with an overview of each play and a brief summary of each plot. This is followed by a section discussing the ways in which the portrayal of Heracles in *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* is atypical in comparison to other theatre portrayals of him. Both plays portray an atypical Heracles, because both plays show Heracles in a way that other plays and playwrights up to this point did not. The Heracles of both these plays is intimately linked with his past history, and various characteristics associated with him over the centuries are incorporated into the new portrayal in the tragedies. Both plays present a protagonist who suffers deep inner conflict, both between his past and present selves, and also between his divine and human aspects. The two tragedies approach this depiction in different ways, but they are linked by the fact that, in both, Heracles suffers as a result of his own inherent nature and this inner conflict leads to external conflict in the plays. The final sections of chapters 4.2 and 4.3 examine the tragic elements of the portrayal of Heracles. Also, apart from the investigation of the distinctive characteristics of Heracles depicted in the tragedies, the chapter examines *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* as particularly fine examples of tragedies in terms of how they treat their tragic hero protagonist. In this way, both plays are exemplary and exceptional amongst other works of their genre.

What this thesis has hoped to highlight is that Heracles has remained an incredibly potent figure: he is referenced and used as a metaphor in nearly every area of life,⁵⁷ and new discussions, adaptations and media about him continue to be produced every year. His strength, his Labours, his forceful personality, his great achievements and the divide between his human and divine natures are well known even today. This speaks of enormous appeal, intrinsic to his character, as powerful today as it was for the Greeks. However, this thesis argues that the widespread acknowledgment of Heracles often misses the depths and nuances of his character. As this thesis has shown, the ancient Greeks were as prone to stereotyping Heracles as we are today, although they did so for different and varied reasons as mentioned in the previous sections. *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* serve us well in providing an opportunity to examine in some depth the nature, motivations and character of Heracles because these works do full justice to his character and the rich history behind it. The fact that these two plays have survived should be deeply appreciated by anyone who wishes to explore the subtleties not only of Heracles, but of Greek mythology as a whole.

Because of his own nature, Heracles has always been a difficult figure to understand and this remains the case today, which has the result that many observers choose to avoid examining him fully. The numerous factors determining the way in which Heracles was portrayed in Greek theatre have been discussed in some depth in this thesis. I have tried to emphasise the importance of difficult, challenging analyses of figures that are most admired and popular, lest we lose sight of the depth and complexity that drew us to them in the first place. The insights into how the Greeks in general and Sophocles and Euripides specifically viewed and portrayed Heracles can be applied to our understanding of popular figures today who are similarly honoured.

To restate from chapter 1, Heracles was simultaneously exceptional and exemplary amongst the Greek heroes. He was capable of the best and the worst that any mortal could achieve. These contradictions are what makes him an authentic character; they are what generate conflict in him, and conflict is the driving element of tragedy and indeed of drama as a whole. It is for these reasons that knowing the “Suffering Heracles” in all his complexities is so relevant for us, and it is why an analysis of *The Trachiniae* and the *Heracles* is a rewarding task.

⁵⁷ Albeit most often referred to as Hercules, his impact and importance remain notable, as he is still placed in a largely Greek context.

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